

THE JOURNEY: A Guide for Reflection

Abundance

(October 2022 | Volume 2, Issue 2)

In 1725, the French playwright Léonor Jean Christine Soulas d'Allainval completed his first major work: *L'Embaras des richesses*. In 1738, John Ozell gave us his English translation of the title and created a meaningful idiom in the process: “an embarrassment of riches.” There is a bitter irony attached to this phrase, given that d'Allainval himself died in poverty and obscurity. There are reports that his life was simply one of misery. And yet. He gave to the world an idiom to help concentrate the mind on our experiences of abundance—life's riches.

I recall originally hearing the phrase in my late teens and having no idea what it meant. I remember hearing it again and again, in various contexts across the years that followed, and only starting to appreciate what the strange phrase was really getting at: that there are moments when we are aware that our lives, at least in some ways, are blessed by abundance. I'm struck now by how often it seems to describe so many aspects of life, if we're willing to notice.

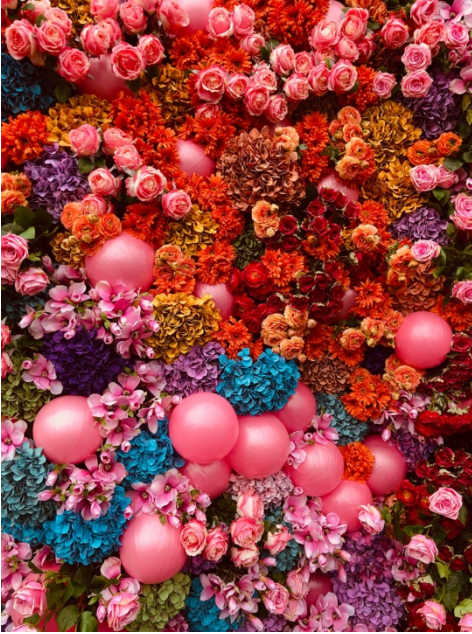
As we take up this theme for the month, we invite you to reflect on the blessings you experience in your life. The areas of abundance you note may relate to the whole of your life, or they may be contained to a particular area or two. In this assessment, you may also find areas of scarcity or even, well, over-abundance. These may point in directions of change.

The overarching questions for this month are about how we respond to the experience of abundance. Does it move us to gratitude? Does it inspire wonder or overwhelm us? Does it make us uncomfortable and, even, a bit embarrassed? Does it move us to make some response, by sharing what we already have plenty of or deciding to not take on more than we need? This month's theme is an invitation to delve deeper into the meaning of abundance, with all the complexities it contains.

I'm wishing you a fruitful month of reflection.

In faith and love,
Shawn

Questions to Live With



1. Is there an “embarrassment of riches” in some part of your life? How do you feel about it?
2. How do you understand the difference between abundance and enough?
3. Some traditions speak of abundance as a sign of blessing or an experience of grace. How do you make sense of abundance?
4. And how do you make sense of a lack of abundance?
5. Have you ever experienced having too much of a good thing? What was that like?
6. If not one of the above, what is your question about abundance this month?

For Inspiration

When it comes to life the critical thing is whether you take things for granted or take them with gratitude.

- G. K. Chesterton

Enough is a decision not an amount.

- Alison Faulkner

“Abundance” - Amy Schmidt

in memory of Mary Oliver

It's impossible to be lonely
when you're zesting an orange.
Scrape the soft rind once
and the whole room
fills with fruit.
Look around: you have
more than enough.
Always have.
You just didn't notice
until now.



“Merit” – Lynn Ungar

Why me? What did I do
to deserve this?
A blue September sky
and the scent of late-blooming
honeysuckle and roses,
the maple just starting
to flash red and—who knew—
a second crop of raspberries
starting to ripen on the vine.
What have I ever done that merits
the generosity of rain,
and the way the world opens
into green? I mean, I have tried
to be kind, but not like the
cherry tomatoes, blushing
and turning sweet and
giving themselves away
by the handful. Of course
I don't deserve this, any more
than you deserve fire or flood
or sickness or heartache. There is not
math for this, no equation
that balances the equal sign.
Only this outpouring
of all that is, the waterfall
we stand under, and drink from,
and try not to drown.



“Splendour” - Thomas Centolella

One day it's the clouds,
one day the mountains.
One day the latest bloom
of roses - the pure monochromes,
the dazzling hybrids - inspiration
for the cathedral's round windows.
Every now and then
there's the splendour
of thought: the singular
idea and its brilliant retinue -
words, cadence, point of view,
little gold arrows flitting
between the lines.
And too the splendour
of no thought at all:
hands lying calmly
in the lap, or swinging
a six iron with effortless
tempo. More often than not
splendour is the star we orbit
without a second thought,
especially as it arrives
and departs. One day
it's the blue glassy bay,
one day the night
and its array of jewels,
visible and invisible.
Sometimes it's the warm clarity
of a face that finds your face
and doesn't turn away.
Sometimes a kindness, unexpected,
that will radiate farther
than you might imagine.
One day it's the entire day
itself, each hour foregoing
its number and name,
its cumbersome clothes, a day
that says come as you are,
large enough for fear and doubt,
with room to spare: the most secret
wish, the deepest, the darkest,
turned inside out.

It is difficult to know what to do with so much happiness. With sadness there is something to rub against, a wound to attend with lotion and cloth. When the world falls in around you, you have pieces to pick up, something to hold in your hands, like ticket stubs or change. But happiness floats. It doesn't need you to hold it down. It doesn't need anything... Since there is no place large enough to contain so much happiness, you shrug, you raise your hands, and it flows out of you into everything you touch. You are not responsible. You take no credit, as the night sky takes no credit for the moon but continues to hold it, and share it, and in that way, be known.

- Naomi Shihab Nye



The world is fairly studded and strewn with pennies cast broadside by a generous hand. But—and this is the point—who gets excited by a mere penny? But if you cultivate a healthy poverty and simplicity, so that finding a penny will literally make your day, then, since the world is in fact planted in pennies, you have with your poverty bought a lifetime of days.

- Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

We gaze into the night
as if remembering the bright unbroken planet
we once came from,
to which we will never
be permitted to return.
We are amazed how hurt we are.
We would give anything for what we have.

- Tony Hoagland

“Lightening the Load” - Francis Dorff, O. Praem.

The first thing we have to do
is to notice
that we've loaded down this camel
with so much baggage
we'll never get through the desert alive.
Something has to go.

Then we can begin to dump
the thousand things
we've brought along
until even the camel has to go
and we're walking barefoot
on the desert sand.

There's no telling what will happen then.
But I've heard that someone,
walking in this way,
has seen a burning bush.



A Prayer among Friends” – John Daniel

Among other wonders of our lives, we are alive
with one another, we walk here
in the light of this unlikely world
that isn't ours for long.
May we spend generously
the time we are given.
May we enact our responsibilities
as thoroughly as we enjoy
our pleasures. May we see with clarity,
may we seek a vision
that serves all beings, may we honour
the mystery surpassing our sight,
and may we hold in our hands
the gift of good work
and bear it forth whole, as we
were borne forth by a power we praise
to this one Earth, this homeland of all we love.

“Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life” - Melody Beattie

Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life.
It turns denial into acceptance,
Chaos into order,
Confusion to clarity.
It can turn a meal into a feast,
A house into a home,
A stranger into a friend.
Gratitude makes sense of our past,
Brings peace for today,
And creates vision for tomorrow.



Taking stock of what I have and what I haven't,
What do I find?
The things I got will keep me satisfied
Checking up on what I have and what I haven't,
What do I find?
A healthy balance on the credit side...
Got no mansion, got no yacht,
Still I'm happy with what I've got.
I got the sun in the morning and the moon at night.
Sunshine gives me a lovely day.
Moonlight gives me the Milky Way.
Got no chequebooks, got no banks,
Still I'd like to express my thanks.
I got the sun in the morning and the moon at night.
And with the sun in the morning
And the moon in the evening,
I'm all right.

- Irving Berlin

Optional Spiritual Exercise



This month's spiritual exercise is an invitation to take stock of your life—to take an inventory of what you have and what you haven't, to paraphrase the lyrics of Irving Berlin. What you decide to tally is entirely up to you. Perhaps it's your album collection, or those teacups you've collected across the years. Maybe it's the relationships that have sustained you throughout your life. Or the various types of trees you can name when you're out in a forest or a park. The point is to identify those places where you recognise an abundance in your life—those places of plenty. With your inventory in hand, what do you notice?

Join Us

Join a Journey Group

Journey Groups are a great way to go deeper with our monthly theme by sharing with small group of people for a couple of hours each month. Groups meet online on Zoom and are scheduled at different times during the month.

For more information, visit our website firstunitariantoronto.org/journey-groups/ or look for the link in *First Light*.

Upcoming Themes

November – Impermanence | December – Healing | January – Grounding
February – Love | March – Anger | April – Welcome | May - Freedom

Upcoming Services

Sundays at 10:30

October 2nd
“Temples of the Heart”
Rev. Shawn Newton

October 23rd
“What Is Spiritual Care?”
Rev. Lynn Harrison

October 9th
Thanksgiving Sunday & Harvest Communion
“Gratitude Adjustment”
Rev. Shawn Newton

October 30th
“Facing Life’s Fragility”
Rev. Shawn Newton

October 16th
“The Place of the Pulpit”
Rev. Shawn Newton

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