

# “Enough Stuff”

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N.B. These sermons are made available with a request: that the reader appreciate that, ideally, a sermon is an oral/aural experience that takes place in the context of worship, supported and reinforced by readings, contemplative music, rousing hymns, silence, and prayer and that it is but one part of an extended conversation that occurs over time between a minister and a covenanted congregation.

I recently came across an amusing,  
but somewhat horrifying list  
of how much stuff many people actually own.

The average American home contains 300,000 items.  
(I'm sure the average Canadian home isn't far behind.)

According to the British newspaper, The Telegraph,  
the average 10 year-old owns 238 toys  
but only plays with 12 of them each day.

The Daily Mail tells us that women will spend  
about eight years of our lives shopping.

That one really got to me, as did this:

Apparently over the course of a lifetime, many of us will spend 153  
days searching for lost stuff.

We look for about nine lost things each day, they say.  
The top contenders are phones, keys, sunglasses and paperwork.

It's a statistic I wish were not true,  
but personal experience tells me that it is.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Becoming Minimalist: 21 Surprising Statistics that Reveal How Much Stuff We Actually Own <https://www.becomingminimalist.com/clutter-stats/>

According to the Worldwatch Institute, those of us who live in North America and Western Europe account for 60 percent of private consumer spending—even though we only make up 12 percent of the world’s population.

Meanwhile, about a third of the world’s population lives in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

Their consumer spending is only 3.2 percent of the total, compared to our 60.

*We go up and down the ladders looking for that buzz...  
But I’m every bit as baffled as I ever was.*

*The planet is in tatters and it’s all because  
[We] can’t tell the stuff that doesn’t matter  
from the stuff that does...*

*Stuff that doesn’t matter from the stuff...  
The stuff that does.<sup>2</sup>*

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Back in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, Teresa of Avila wrote that “nothing can trouble, nothing can frighten Those who seek God shall never go wanting.”

Well, given how much we seem to be wanting...  
and how much damage that wanting is doing...

perhaps we do need to seek  
a simpler Source of Good  
that might sustain us,  
whether we call it “God” or not.

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<sup>2</sup> Lynn Harrison, “Stuff,” on Simplicity (2008) and at <http://lynoleum.com/mp3/Stuff.mp3>

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This is a perennial message.  
Spiritual writers and teachers of all religious paths  
return to it, again and again.

The monastic speaks of God,  
but the modern yoga teacher says  
“It’s enough to be and breathe,  
to feel the touch of  
wind on skin.”

The essence of both messages is simple presence,  
the ground of being,  
in this moment now,  
which is utterly sufficient  
with nothing else needed.

How rarely we let ourselves sink  
into this deep sufficiency.

How difficult it is for us to let go  
of the next good thing,  
the most important desire...  
the so fervent hope.

The Unitarian Universalist minister  
Teresa Soto makes the connection between  
our desire for material stuff and  
our perpetual attachment to  
something better in the future  
in their poem called “A Simple Hope.”

“Last year the it toy was  
some kind of beeping computerized egg.  
The frenzy and desperation  
reaching for the perfect gift.  
Sold out everywhere, this egg.

Hope can be kind of like that.  
People strain and struggle for  
the perfect definition.  
Is it now? Or future perfect,  
as in we will have survived.  
They argue over whether we even  
need a hope more present than  
a maybe, even when you don’t feel it.

A healthy hope is the power,  
and beyond that the choosing  
to stay. Stay with the doubt and fear.

Stay with the work that it takes to resist.  
Leave giving up for another day.

You could wrestle the words or  
sensation of hope to the mat.

Or you could let this moment be enough,  
belonging here together be sufficient.

Feast on our irrepressible power to stay.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Teresa I. Soto, *Spilling the Light: Meditations on Hope and Resilience* (Skinner House: Boston, 2019), 3.

Teresa Soto, like the other poet-teachers,  
holds up presence and relationship as the essence of “enough.”

Indeed, I could fill this sermon with “enough” poems—  
but that would be too many.

It could even be said that the number of words we use,  
the number of ideas and analyses and approaches  
we so fervently gather—

perhaps to give us a sense of hope or control—

are contributing to the over-abundance  
under which so many of us are suffering.

When I was still in seminary, I remember  
one of my mentors saying to me:

“You don’t need very many books.  
Maybe ten.”

(I’m working on that.)

It’s very interesting to me that the ancient spiritual message  
of “enoughness,” which keeps springing up in new forms,  
is now being spoken by science—

As we come to grips with the immediate physical necessity  
to figure out exactly what is enough and to live by it.

To finally be able to tell  
“the stuff that doesn’t matter from the stuff that does.”

It’s as if our species is being called now into spiritual development,  
and if we can’t or won’t grow  
in this way, we simply won’t continue.

The spiritual discipline of learning to live with less is no longer some kind of esoteric hope for contemplatives in monasteries— as if it ever was—

Instead, it's become the prescription for every human being, if we are to survive.

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We sometimes think this medicine will be impossible to take— yet perhaps it's easier than we thought.

Because a key dimension of “enough” is the “enough” that we already are.

It's true that on the one hand, we seek to be “more” ethical, more conscious, more “woke,” more green...

And yet, at the same time, when we are fully present in the moment, grounded in the God or no-God of our understanding, we are simply enough because we simply are.

This paradox faces each of us, as people seeking to live a more deeply spiritual, or, if you like, a more deeply aware and relational life.

The joined-together truth is that we are called both to do and to have— yet also to simply be.

Even the fact that we are baffled about how to do this is enough.

As the poet Wendell Berry wrote,

“It may be that when we no longer know what to do,  
That we have come to our real work.

The mind that is not baffled is not employed.”

To be baffled, to be without answers,  
to be present and listening...this is enough.

(Even when—or especially when—we don’t know that it is!)

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The Planet Earth teaches us that what has seemed  
not nearly “enough” by human standards  
is perfectly enough for nature and always has been.

We sense, intuitively, that what we call “things”  
such as trees and stones  
have as much to teach us as any book.

In recent years, science has revealed that in fact  
there is far more going on  
under the surface of things than we thought.

That trees communicate with each other underground...

That particles once joined together are never truly separated  
even if they appear to be, in time and space.

That there is more than enough life in Life...  
more than enough mystery and depth  
to hold us in awe and gratitude all of our days.

To paraphrase Teresa of Avila: “This alone is enough.”

Yet we, being human and fallible  
and with our limited understandings

Fall into our traps again and again...  
of thinking that what we have isn't enough

That what we're doing isn't enough...

That who we are isn't enough.

Well, if we imagine that we need to be  
everything all at once perhaps that is true.

But of course, that's not what we're called to be.

We are, each of us, an essential piece of the  
Interconnected Web of All Existence.

We are not called to do everything.  
We are called to do our part.

There's a wonderful meme floating around Facebook  
that assures us, we don't even have to be perfectly attuned  
to all the important issues of our times...  
we don't have to do everything perfectly or consistently...

In order to contribute positively to the changes needed now.

Carla Borthwick writes: "To the person who uses metal straws to  
save fish but consumes animals, I say thank you!

To the vegan who isn't aware of the homelessness problem...  
thank you!

It's not everyone's job to save every part of the world."

In the wonderful way that perennial wisdom  
returns again and again,  
Facebook has given us a new version of the  
old Jewish story...

In which the rabbi says, “At the end of days,  
God will not ask me, ‘why were you not Moses?  
He will ask, why were you not Zusya?’”

As long as we do our part. That is enough.

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To discern what our part is, is not always an easy task.

We may feel called in many different directions...  
We may feel that we need many different things...

Yet when we allow ourselves  
to simply listen to the enoughness of life  
that is present in silence and stillness...

We may find ourselves able let go of something:

An expectation...  
A possession...  
A compulsion...  
A desire...

And then, having let go just a little,  
Into a way of being that may be unfamiliar to us...

We may find ourselves better able to relate to one another  
on a level that is deeper and more grounded in Life  
than the way we were doing it before.

We may be able to meet each other  
from the shared roots of our being,  
rather than the surface of our individual self-interest.

We may be able to be with each other  
in a new, and yet very old way...

A way that is fully and completely enough.

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