

# “When More Is Not Enough”

## Sermon by Rev. Rebecca Bryan

November 21, 2021

How do we know when enough is enough?

How can we tell if our appetite is satisfied or even sated?

I don't know about you, but my sense of satisfaction, or "enoughness," was broken long ago. For much of my life, I repeatedly passed the state of enough and moved to being sated, or beyond full, be it with food, responsibilities, or even self-improvement. It seemed that no matter how much I tried, it was never enough. And I still struggle with this, though it's getting better all the time.

"Enough is as good as a feast" is one of my favorite quotations, introduced to me by parishioner Merryll Maleska Wilbur. I find the old English saying provocative; it makes me stop and think. Its pithiness demonstrates its truth: "Enough is as good as a feast."

I acknowledge that I have written this morning's reflection for those who have the privilege and burden of being able to overconsume. Many in life are not so privileged. I recognize that.

For those who can overconsume — and I can only speak from that place in life — the question, "*When is enough, enough?*" is challenging and, I believe, critical.

When does more become not enough, but destructive? In the simplest of terms, we know we've had enough when we are able to appreciate what we are consuming and what we are doing or experiencing and appreciate the company of our companions if we are not alone. Eating enough food leaves our bellies feeling secure and contained. We smile and maybe even salivate when we remember what we just ate. Enjoying enough company with others brings us a sense of belonging, connection, or stimulation. We finish the exchange different from where we started, having met our social or intellectual needs. Engaging in enough web surfing gives us the information we need to write a paper or make an informed decision. We may finish the research more curious, assured, or confused; regardless, we remember what it was we were researching when we started.

On the other hand, more than enough food leaves

us feeling physically uncomfortable, often regretful, and sometimes even ashamed. "How did I do it again? It was only going to be one piece of pie." When we've had more than enough company, we might stop listening, start to check out, or be insensitive in our interactions. When we have exceeded a healthy amount of screen time, we can be disorientated, disconnected, and drained.

I find that living in accordance with the principle of *enough* allows me to experience genuine gratitude, connection, and even bliss. Those feelings don't happen when I overindulge, in anything.

Lest I am making this sound easy, I assure you it is not, at least in my experience. For most of us, this process of consuming enough, whether it is physical, mental, or social, is something we learn to do, unless we are so fortunate as to have been taught otherwise. Maybe we were parented perfectly and lived unaffected by the prevailing culture around us, a culture that promotes more than enough through marketing, portion sizes, and addictive technology.

The value of moderation, or "enoughness," is an ancient truth. Two of the three inscriptions on a column before the Temple of Delphi read: *Know thyself* and *Nothing in excess*. (The third was, *Surety brings ruin*)

Why then is enoughness so difficult to carry out? There are many answers to that. I'll offer one example on each of the physical, mental, and spiritual levels. Physically, it is challenging for many of us to stay in our bodies. We have learned to dissociate, distract, or intellectualize, every time we get too close to a feeling, especially if it's challenging. Mentally, we have bought into a lie that more is better. Sadly, this lie can also carry into our spirituality.

William Blake knew this when he wrote:

*To see a World in a Grain of Sand,  
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,  
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,  
And Eternity in an hour.*

Can you remember when you experienced eternity in a moment? Maybe it was as recent as

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this morning; perhaps it was long ago. The Encyclopedia Britannica was my entry into eternity that years later the World Wide Web stole from me.

Picture if you will some 45 years ago, when I was ten years old. I raised my hand in history class and asked a question I don't even remember. The teacher's response was predictable: "I don't know...Why don't you find out?" The exact words I needed to gain me a hall pass to go to the library where answers lay hidden on the bookshelves. My saddle shoes made a certain clumpy sound as I skipped across the linoleum floors to the library. I pulled up a stool to the stacks, stood on my tippy toes, and held my breath in anticipation. The heavy volume nearly dropped into my loving embrace, in which I carried it to the long wooden table and opened it with a gasp. The pictures, the words, the worlds—eternity—and sooner or later, an answer to the question I had asked, whatever that was.

I still remember the sense of devastation I felt 15 years later when the World Wide Web came on the scene. Somehow, I knew it ran the risk of robbing me of the chance to meet eternity in my quest for truth, the eternity I found when I put my hands on the pages of books, whose scent, words, and images opened up the world. More was not better.

True to the inkling, I must be careful about how quickly and frequently I turn to look online for answers and for what duration. The information I find there is often suspect in source, distracting if not overwhelming, and lacking any invitation to eternity.

How then do we master this skill of taking in enough?

First, it is critical to remember that what is enough differs for you and me. I cannot consume sugar, I need to sharply limit television input, and I find more than one party on any day to be too much. On the other hand, the two hours of spiritual practice I spend in meditation and prayer each morning would be intolerable for anyone else in my family.

Second, consuming enough needs to be something we consciously and consistently choose. It starts with our mind. In her book

*Rising Strong*, sociologist and author Brené Brown says: "For me, the opposite of scarcity is not abundance. It's enough. I'm enough. My kids are enough."

My wish for you this Thanksgiving is that you take the time to experience enough, whether it is looking at one flower, taking a long walk with nothing else to do, or having a single conversation with a neighbor, or the family member, who gets under your skin.

May you experience the miracle of eternity that comes with enough and nothing more.

Amen and blessed be.