

“All We Need”
Reverend Bill Gause
Overbrook Presbyterian Church
30th Sunday in Ordinary Time
October 29, 2017

First Scripture Reading: Psalm 24:1-5

¹The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; ²for He has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers. ³Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in His holy place? ⁴Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully. ⁵They will receive blessing from the Lord, and vindication from the God of their salvation.

Second Scripture Reading: Acts 4:32-35, 6:1-7

4 ³²Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. ³³With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. ³⁴There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. ³⁵They laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

6 ¹Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. ²And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. ³Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, ⁴while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word.” ⁵What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. ⁶They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. ⁷The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.



Sermon: “All We Need”

Money is a touchy subject. Most people don’t like to talk about it, and when they do, the conversations can be difficult. Surveys show that money is the most common reason that married couples fight. A Money Magazine survey from 2014 found that “70 percent of couples argued about money more than household chores, togetherness, sex, snoring and what’s for dinner.”¹ But according to researchers, the main reason so many couples fight about money is because they don’t talk about money.²

¹ "POLL: How Husbands and Wives Really Feel About Their Finances." *Time*. Time, 1 June 2014. Web. 26 Oct. 2015. <<http://time.com/money/2800576/love-money-by-the-numbers/>>.

² Tysiac, Ken. "Financial Matters Are Top Cause of Couples’ Spats, Survey Shows." *Journal of Accountancy* (May 4, 2012): Web. 11 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.journalofaccountancy.com/News/20125634>>.

Which is part of the reason we have a stewardship campaign in the church, so we can openly talk about our financial resources, how we use them, and why we should use them for God's church. Today is the last day of that campaign. Which means that the Stewardship committee is asking you to pledge your time, talent, and treasure one last time. That's what the event out in the Narthex is all about. And it means that I have the task of making one final plea for us all to support the church financially in the coming year, not only as we have in years past, but even better and with even more conviction; So, buckle up.

One of my favorite authors is David Sedaris. He is a frequent contributor to the *New Yorker*, *Esquire*, and NPR and has published several volumes of short stories, all factual recollections of his own life. In one of my favorites, he writes about his love of, and desperate need for, coffee. He starts each day by making a pot. In this particular story, he describes a day when he woke to find that the water had been shut off by the utility commission in order to perform routine maintenance.

When he went to make his coffee, he found that he had no water. It posed for him a sort of Catch-22: "In order to think straight," he writes, "I needed caffeine, and in order to make that happen I needed to think straight." He continues: "Once, in a half-sleep, I made it with Perrier, which sounds plausible but really isn't. On another occasion, I heated up some leftover tea and poured that over the grounds. Had the tea been black rather than green, the coffee might have worked out, but, as it was, the result was vile. It wasn't the sort of thing you'd try more than once, so this time I skipped the teapot and headed straight for a vase of wildflowers sitting by the phone on one of the living-room tables... I grabbed the entire bunch and tossed it out the window. That done, I carried the vase into the kitchen, and emptied the yellow water into a pan, which I then boiled and used to make coffee."³

You see, in some recipes you can fudge ingredients. There are often acceptable equivalences. Don't have sour cream? Use some plain yogurt instead. Out of buttermilk? Then just add some vinegar or lemon juice to the same amount of whole milk. If you're missing an ingredient for your recipe, you can often find a substitute; something that will work almost as well. But for making coffee, there really is no substitute for water. Somethings you just need - and trying to substitute anything else is a recipe for disaster.

In the book of Acts, we find the story of the church when it really began as an institution. And here, in these early stories, we find the things that the church needs to survive.

First of all, the church needs the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. As Psalm 127 says, "Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain."⁴ With the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the early church was filled with God's spirit and thus it grew and spread around the world.

What we have here, that we know as Overbrook Church, has been bequeathed to us from generations before us. We trace our roots all the way back to that first church of Peter and Philip and Stephen. God moved and guided the people of this area and over the years this church grew and became as God allowed it and it stands today as a safe-haven for those who are wounded and a home base for those who have answered the call of discipleship.

In the simplest terms, as Jesus said, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."⁵ But for the church to thrive, it must have people, and those people must be willing to share the

³ Sedaris, David. "All the Beauty You Will Ever Need." *When You Are Engulfed in Flames*, Little, Brown and Company, 2008, pp. 158–165.

⁴ Psalm 127:1, NRSV

⁵ Matthew 18:20, NRSV

gifts that God has given them for the purposes to which God has called them. We see that in the stories we read from the book of Acts this morning, where the early Christians sold their property to raise money for their mission and ministry. And when that ministry became too much, they recruited new people to help carry it out.

The mission of the church is to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to all the world. To “go and make disciples of all nations” is the way Jesus put it. Now, you don’t need a building to do that, or a website or a pipe organ or a preschool. Those things might make the job easier and the presentation more compelling, but they aren’t things that we absolutely need.

Frankly, we don’t need all of the things we have here at Overbrook to be the church. There’s a church in Alexandria, VA that saw there was a need in their neighborhood for affordable housing, so they redeveloped their building and turned it into apartments for low-income residents. Then they rented back the basement to hold their worship services.

They are being the church in an incredible, radical way, without some of the traditional things we would expect of a church, like a building. Are we prepared to do something like that? We could.

But if we believe we are being called to be in ministry to this community in this space, then what we need is people and money: people to do the ministry to which God has called us, and money to pay for it. It’s as plain and simple as that. The church is a complicated recipe with a lot of ingredients, and if you don’t have an ingredient, you can usually substitute something else. But the two critical ingredients are people and money. And for those two ingredients, there are really no substitutes.

The amazing good news, though, is that we have plenty of both. Isn’t that good to hear? We have enough of what we need to do the work to which God has called us.

We have enough people to teach children’s Sunday School classes and to be youth advisors. We have enough people to invite our neighbors to come be a part of the church. We have enough people to run the mission projects we do and even start up a few new ones.

We have enough people to be able to support one another through difficult times, visit when we’re sick and lonely, and be a listening ear when we’re feeling overwhelmed. We have enough people to greet visitors and be covenant partners for our youth when they go through confirmation and to keep the nursery during worship. We have enough people to reach out to the strangers and to welcome the immigrants and to perform the work of ministries that help the poor and the oppressed. We have enough.

And we have enough money to support all those ministries. We have enough money to keep this house of the Lord warm and well-lit so that the children of God can find a safe place to meet God all year long. We have enough money to provide meals for the hungry and to help the poor to keep their homes warm and well-lit, too. We have enough money to support the CRC, and The Y Family Center Shelter and a whole host of ministries that are doing the work of God. We have enough money to do the work to which God has called us.

And we don’t have all of those people and all of that money because we’re so good and talented and gosh-darn attractive. We have those people and all that money because God almighty, in Her infinite wisdom and grace, has led those people to our doors and has put that money into our pockets. Thank God that we have enough because all that we have, and all that we are, come from God.

Isn't that great news?!? Isn't it fabulous and wonderful and amazing to not have to worry about where the people will come from to do the work and where the money will come from to pay for it?!? Because it's all right here. Hallelujah!

We just have to do one thing. It's a small thing really. But it may be the most challenging, difficult thing we'll ever have to do. We have to unpack the garage.

This month, Mary and I got to take two weeks of vacation. We didn't go anywhere exciting. We didn't do anything impressive. But we did take some time to relax. We had some lunches together, saw a movie, did a little shopping, but most importantly, we finally finished some long-needed projects around the house. One of those was cleaning out the garage which mainly involved emptying out boxes of stuff that had been stored in there since we moved in three years ago. Some of those boxes had never been unpacked from when we moved from Clemson five years ago.

When we opened them up, we found a bunch of stuff that we didn't need any more, so we got rid of it. But we also found a lot of things that we could really use. There were drinking glasses and books and framed pictures that had once hung on our walls. We found my old pair of Bean boots, a set of drill bits, and a whole bunch of tools that we had forgotten we owned.

None of that stuff was new. We'd had it for years. But it wasn't doing us a lick of good because it was just sitting there in boxes in the garage. For five years I've been slopping around in the rain because I didn't know I had a pair of duck boots out there. Things we needed were buried in the garage, where they were dry and safe, but they weren't being put to good use.

We have what we need to be the church. God has already filled this place with the Holy Spirit, and God has already given us the people and money we need. You see all of those people are here, we just need everyone to get engaged in the work of the church. And all of that money is here, but we have to take it out of our pockets. We have to unpack the garage.

A few weeks ago, I preached what I said was one of the most difficult sermons I've ever preached. I called it the worst sermon ever because I couldn't bring you comforting answers, only more challenging questions. But today, I think this is one of the easiest sermons to preach because it is so clear and straightforward.

To live, thrive, and survive, the church needs us. The church isn't a diner where we come, eat, and leave. It's not a theater where we sit down and enjoy the show and then go home. It's not a social club where we meet cool people and do a few service projects before we go back to our *real* lives. The church is us and it's more than one hour a week.

But we all know this. It's not news. This congregation has always been active and generous. But we can't rest on what we've done before. Every year we do a stewardship campaign because every year we need to be reminded of the need for us to participate with our time, our talents, and our treasure. I know you get tired of hearing it and I get tired of saying it. But it needs to be said and it needs to be heard. You can't make good coffee if you don't have water, and you can't do good ministry if you don't have the people stepping up to make that ministry their own.

We know from the ancient story of the church that God has provided all that we have and all that we are. Every talent, every bit of time, every resource we enjoy is a gift from God. And the very fact that we have

found this congregation and this safe place to be a part of the body of Christ is a blessing from God. But if we truly appreciate and value what God has given to us and done for us, then we have to be willing to use all that for the ministry to which God has called us.

That's the crucial ingredient. That's all we need!

To God be all glory, honor, power, and dominion, in this world, and in the world that is to come. Amen.