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Psalm 36:1-12; John 2:1-11

HOUSE OF ABUNDANCE

You are invited to a party at someone's house. When you walk in the door you are warmly greeted and shown to a comfortable chair and introduced to some of the other guests. Tasty hors d'oeuvres are passed around and you are shown where you can find various beverages. The conversation is lively. As the guests sit down to eat, you are served many delicious dishes. There is more than enough to eat so that you can even take a second helping of that potato dish you really liked. Among the other guests, you discover an acquaintance you hadn't seen in ages who grew up in the same neighborhood as you, and you reminisce about the old days. You also meet someone whose wife runs an at-home daycare business, and you think about the couple at church who is expecting a baby soon and in need of child care. You exchange information so you can pass on their name to the couple. There is a lot of laughter when one of the guests tells a funny story about a recent misadventure. Dessert and coffee are served, more conversation follows, and you leave the party feeling satisfied in more ways than one.

This could rightly be described as an evening of abundance. Plenty of good food and drink. Laughter. Old friendships renewed. New connections made. The host or hostess did not likely hold such an event just to feed people a meal but because they wanted to share an evening of abundance--not just in the form of food but also the company, the conversation, and the relationships. The idea of abundance is not just about having a lot. A person can have a lot of things in life and still not know abundance. Abundance is not to be confused with over-

consumption, which leaves us feeling empty in the midst of all our excess. Abundance is not about having a lot but about honoring the gift of being alive and sharing that gift with others.

Both of our scripture readings today revolve around the idea of abundance--God's abundance and how God shares that abundance with us. In the story from John's gospel, Jesus is at a party, a wedding party when the wine runs out. Jesus performs a miracle by turning water into wine. But he doesn't just turn a small pitcher of water into wine. He turns six stone jars of water into wine--each holding twenty or thirty gallons. It was a super abundance of wine. Jesus turns the water into wine not simply to rescue a party from becoming a complete flop, but in order to demonstrate God's abundance, God's desire for us to know abundant life, spiritually and materially.

Perhaps one of the clearest places to witness God's abundance is in the realm of nature. From ancient times to the present, people have marveled at the abundant beauty, diversity, and resources found in nature. We hear that in today's psalm. The writer praises God's abundant generosity and goodness, that extends to the heavens, even to the clouds in the sky. God's abundant goodness is like soaring mountains, as profound as the ocean's depths. According to the psalmist, God's abundant care extends not only to humans but to the animals as well. Like a giant mother bird, the psalmist tells us God gathers all people under her wings. The writer sums up God's generosity in this phrase, "All people feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights." Like a generous host or hostess, God's house is filled with abundance, an abundance given and shared with us. This earth is the house God has given us to live in, the house filled with abundance.

Yet it has been humanity's tendency to abuse and disrespect the abundance of our earthly home. As civilizations have grown, humans have tended to regard the earth for its utilitarian

purposes. We have taken from the earth without thought of long term consequences for other humans or other creatures. We have poured toxins in our waters, polluted our skies, torn down forests, blown up mountains, and slaughtered species to the point of extinction. In some ways we have behaved like disrespectful guests who have stormed into the hostesses house, raided the refrigerator, pillaged the cupboards, and ransacked the house for all we could find for ourselves. Not only is such behavior selfish, it has failed to recognize that there is something sacred in sharing and enjoying the abundance of the home *together* in ways that respect the hostess and the other guests.

The writer of today's psalm recognizes that tendency in us humans. Psalm 36 begins with a description of people who lack a sense of the sacred, who live life driven by dishonesty and greed. The writer tells us that with such people, "there is no fear of God before their eyes. For they flatter themselves in their own eyes." Such people have "ceased to act wisely and do good," choosing the path of evil. The wickedness described by the writer is expressed by those who live a me-centered, selfish life.

This selfish, me-centered approach to life describes the way the Western industrialized nations in particular have tended to treat the earth and its resources. We have consumed rather than honored the earth. We have taken without thought to other people, other creatures, or even our own future wellbeing. We have abused and mistreated our home, God's gift to us of a beautiful home.

In past decades we began to wake up to our mistreatment of our home and try to amend our ways. We began to pay a bit more attention to the cleanliness of our air and water. We began to see the value in preserving natural lands, in careful conservation. But now the environmental problem we face, the consequence of our behaviors is not just a matter of picking

up trash along our highways or of cleaning up our river systems. Now the environmental crisis we face is climate change which threatens the welfare of the entire planet. Hard science tells us that the climate changes we are seeing now are the result of human behaviors. And scientists warn us with a sense of great urgency that the nations of the world must adopt significant changes. Certainly individuals such as you and I can do our part to reduce our carbon footprint. But the most significant changes needed to address this crisis in meaningful ways must be taken by the leaders and governments of the world, particularly those industrialized nations like the United States that produce most of the green house gas emissions.

And yet, in the face of the most urgent global crisis the world has known, the United States government is turning away from meaningful action. Our government has backed out of the Paris Climate Treaty, reversed course on improving automobile gas efficiency, relaxed emission regulations for industries, and embraced high polluting forms of energy such as coal. This disastrous course of action is short-sighted and selfish and fails to protect the planet and its abundance for the future generations.

As a result of our government's failure to ensure that future generations can know this earth's abundance, a landmark law suit known as *Juliana v. the United States* has been lodged by a group of 21 children and young adults. This group of children and young adults, ranging from ages 10 to 21, have taken the federal government to court for violating their generation's constitutional rights to life, liberty, and property. They claim that the federal government's promotion of fossil fuel production and its indifference to the risks posed by greenhouse gas emissions have resulted in "a dangerous destabilizing climate system" that threatens the survival of future generations. The President of the United States is named as a defendant in the case.

The trial was supposed to begin in November but due to legal petitions and delays it was postponed and is expected to begin in upcoming months. Communities of faith around the country are asked to pray for the plaintiffs, these children and youth, and for the case itself as it comes to trial. Pope Francis himself in his famous encyclical on climate change called on people of all ages to join in the effort to address this crisis. He declared, "Intergenerational solidarity is not optional, but rather a basic question of justice, since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us."

Psalm 36 begins with this description of those driven by a me-centered, selfish approach to life, but then contrasts this attitude with the abundance of God. In doing so, the writer offers us all a choice between two paths we can follow. We can set ourselves up as gods, flattering ourselves, living however we want without regard to others or the consequences of our actions. Or we can choose to live in the shadow of the God of abundant love and generosity.