

Thoughts from the Garden – January 2015

As we are entering into this season of scarcity, I am discovering abundance. It began one afternoon while walking the Brentwood grounds in search of pine needles for the children to use as paint brushes. Strolling along underneath the towering pines, I realized that I was walking on ground blanketed in pine needles. I had been hoarding every paintbrush-shaped branch I came across, trying to be sure I would have enough for the hundred or so children who would be using them to create. Once I opened my eyes and realized the plentiful pine needles sprouting like little waterfalls from each branch, I recognized that hoarding was completely unnecessary in this world of abundance. I took what I needed and left the rest. Jesus feeding the five thousand came to mind.

When I recognized the profusion of pine needles shed by the trees, I also noticed that there was no waste. The needles on the ground would slowly break down and enrich the soil thus contributing to the health of the trees. Birds and squirrels would gather some for their nests, and children would explore a few to learn a bit about the world around them. The disciples collected twelve baskets full of leftovers. Nothing was to be wasted.

This simple experience of the generosity of nature got me thinking. Nature seems to do everything abundantly. I might have recognized this while picking the pounds of string beans this summer or the multitude of pumpkins this autumn. One seed gives rise to hundreds of seeds more. I find in myself the opposite of the generosity that nature models. In my hesitation to waste, I hoard or I give barely enough. Mary Lou calls me “skimpy” – a title I certainly earned when she asked for wheat to show a group of students and I handed her one grain. I’d been acting out of a mentality of scarcity; what if I acted out of a mentality of abundance?

In experimenting with the idea of abundance in my own life, one thought seemed to haunt me. There are so many people for whom abundance is not a reality – not enough food, not enough water, not enough health, not enough dignity, not enough. How can I learn abundance from nature when I need not look far to see profound scarcity? What I discovered was a bit surprising and quite hopeful. When I lived out of a mentality of abundance, I found myself sharing more and using and wasting less. I was willing to risk more and I worried less. The real and significant problem of scarcity in the world was addressed in some small way when I lived abundantly.

So now, each time I walk on the earth layered with pine needles, I ask myself: How am I to emulate this great way of being in the world in which I live abundantly and waste not? I wonder how things would change if we all were to recognize the ways we are gifted by abundance and live accordingly. How many basketfuls of leftovers might we collect?