



## Enough for Us

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**T**his month I'm decorating the house for autumn, including a pair of plump Pilgrims that my mother purchased for me. When I set them on the bookshelf, it reminds me that it's harvest-time, a time of gratitude and plenty. I think, as my agrarian ancestors must have thought, it's enough.

I try to take that feeling of "enough" into our family celebrations this season. Like a salmon swimming upstream, it takes effort each year to focus on receiving God's gift and sharing that gift with the world. Our culture's spending message is pervasive, despite economic hard times, and retailers support it, urging us to buy new merchandise despite environmental concerns such as a widening waste stream, pollution, and landfill space.

To resist the current's pull, for several years now I've been making some changes in our holiday observances. I try to prepare simple but satisfying holiday meals using seasonal and local produce and meats. I try to deliver presents in reusable holiday bags. I send Christmas cards on recycled paper. I buy gifts in town if I can, preferably the kind that don't have lots of packaging or batteries. However, I think I'm called to deeper transformation during this season than just serving free-range turkey.

Living sustainably isn't just a set of hoops to jump through, but a choice to live as if God's creation, including his people, really matter—and they

do. I'm not just a cog in the economy's wheel, but someone who has encountered Emmanuel, God-with-us. My celebration of this holy time, starting with Thanksgiving, continuing through Advent and finally to Christmas, ought to be deliberately countercultural. I reject the culture's ways with this holy time not just because I'm green, but because conserving God's resources and honoring my fellow creatures is an act of worship. Our world matters, and people matter—enough that Christ came to save us. Resting in Jesus, and giving the earth a rest, is a way to say "Thank you. You are enough for us. You are all we need."

A few years ago author Bill McKibben penned an article called "Hundred Dollar Holiday." He, along with people in the northern New York and Vermont conference of his denomination, decided to spend only \$100 on presents per family, hand-making them if possible.

Merchants complained that the project would ruin their businesses. Columnists labeled it "extreme." However, McKibben writes, "As we continued our campaign, we found we weren't really interested in changing Christmas because we wanted fewer batteries. We wanted more joy. We felt cheated by the Christmases we were having—so rushed, so busy, so full of mercantile fantasy and catalog hype that we couldn't relax and enjoy the season."

I love the idea of limits, especially when all around I see nothing but excess. I learned this lesson the hard way. In December of 2000, I had absorbed the Martha Stewart philosophy of decorating my home within an inch of its life. I had spent the weekend after Thanksgiving trying to deck the halls, getting grumpier and grumpier because my preschooler wanted to help, my infant wanted to be fed (imagine!), and my husband wasn't reading my nonverbal clues (imagine *that!*). On my way upstairs to fetch the baby, in a hurry, I decided to hurdle a child-safety gate. The floor met me halfway. I found myself with a broken elbow, a half-decorated Christmas tree, and a very sore ego.

That Christmas season, I sat out of everything: baking cookies, shopping, wrapping presents. The tree stayed half-decorated. I sat on the couch, staring at the tree and slowly realizing that this was what I needed—not the garlands, not the endless errands. Aren't the holidays about bringing our wounded selves to Jesus, allowing him to heal us with the good news of his birth?

Choosing to live more sustainably taught me the meaning of enough. I still give my kids more Christmas presents than they really need (who *needs* presents?), and I still eat too much dessert at Thanksgiving, but I know what really satisfies. ■

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