News
EarthBeat



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December 10, 2020
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Second week of Advent theme—Money

Day 12: Thursday, Dec. 10

REFLECT

As part of Simple Advent, Abundant Life, we invited young people to share how they strive to live simply on the earth as a sign of hope that restoration is possible. Today's reflection comes from Josie Schuman, a senior at John Carroll University, in Cleveland:

> "In proportion as he simplifies his life, the laws of the universe will appear less complex."
>
> -Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*
>
> Living simply is hard, especially in today's age of throwaway culture where people discard perfectly good items to be replaced with something new and shiny. I am guilty of buying into this narrative. As a senior in college, I am incredibly grateful to have had the privilege to study abroad my sophomore year, during which I had an epiphany about living simply (as paradoxical as that sounds).
>
> For my five-month trip, I packed one suitcase and agonized over every item. I thought I couldn't survive without a specific shirt or pair of shoes. But while living in Spain, I didn't think twice about something I left at home that I desperately needed. Living out of my suitcase was liberating. I had less decisions to make, creating some much-needed headspace.
>
> In his landmark encyclical "*Laudato Si*', on Care for Our Common Home," Pope Francis discusses the prevalence of "mental pollution" due to lives cluttered by overconsumption. By living simply, I have learned that we can contribute to the end of both mental and environmental pollution.

After returning home from Spain, I was dumbfounded by the sheer amount of stuff I had, so I spent the summer donating more than half my clothes. Since then, I have been trying to make similar changes, such as decreasing my use of single-waste plastics by opting for reusable water bottles and reducing my carbon footprint by consuming less meat.

My journey with environmental justice is new, and I have been trying to make small changes to live more simply. Like most justice work, these individual actions add up. However, one of the most significant changes I am working toward is shifting the narrative.

What we do affects the environment and thus other people — a seemingly obvious reality obscured by the complex nature of our society. For so long, I was ignorant of the connection between the car I drive and the earth's rising temperature, the plastic I use and the cluttered bodies of water, the waste I produce that is dumped in developing nations.

I know I still have so much work to do, but I am slowly waking up to the urgency of the world's environmental crisis, which directly impacts our mental and physical well-being, especially that of the most vulnerable members of society. I have learned that making these small changes to live more simply is only effective when we do so as a collective human family.

So, I invite you to consider, what essential items would you put in your suitcase? What is one small change you will make to live more simply?

-Josie Schuman, John Carroll University

ACT

Implement one change that will help you today live more simply or that will reduce "mental pollution" in your life.

View the Advent Simplicity Calendar for a song to inspire you today.

Simple Advent, Abundant Life

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