

More than enough: Galatians 5:1, 13-25

by [Samuel Wells](#) in the [June 15, 2004](#) issue

The vocation of the church is to celebrate the politics of love. That may sound curious. What does the gentle, touching gift of love have to do with the ugly, underhand machinations of politics?

Most people think of politics as a regrettable but necessary business. Necessary, because we live in a world of scarce resources, there are many of us, and our needs, interests and desires conflict. We need agreements as to the fair distribution of these limited goods, and an established authority to ensure the policing of those agreements. It is regrettable, because in the fight over these scarce resources, each of us fears being revealed as greedy, insecure, envious and deceitful.

Now imagine a different kind of politics. First, consider the things that really matter in this world. St. Paul lists them: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. There is no need for an unseemly scrap over the distribution of these things, because they are not in short supply. Yet I can have enormous sums of money, as many clothes, houses, cars and university degrees as I like, but if I don't have the things St. Paul is talking about, the other things are no good to me. And if I have love, joy, peace and the like, it doesn't matter how much I have of the other things. St. Paul's world still involves politics—but politics of a different kind. Instead of carving up a limited cake, politics becomes the shared discernment of the best use of God's gifts. It is no longer a zero-sum game. My good no longer requires your loss, because the things we want are things that everyone can have.

Although we live in the richest society in the history of the world, we still assume that there is not enough. Not enough life, not enough food, not enough entertainment, not enough happiness. This keeps our economy going. The truth is the opposite. There is too much. We are overwhelmed, and our imaginations can't take it all in. There is limitless beauty for us to wonder at. There is truth to explore—not just the dimensions of science or the ponderings of philosophy but the depths of poetry and the testimony of history. There is goodness in the human spirit to admire—in great explorers and mighty warriors, in the humble potter or the

resourceful midwife. Yet there is also the temptation to steal, because we fear that there will not be “enough.” We are generous when we trust that we’ll have enough; we are covetous and anxious because we have lost this trust.

One of the church’s great proclamations of abundance is marriage. All is focused on a single other—but the truth is that, far from being *not* enough, that one person is more than enough. Just pause and wonder for a moment at the mystery of another person—another mind, another imagination, another myriad of experiences, energies, enthusiasms and enjoyments. Could one ever exhaust that person? And to embody the truth that the good of one partner in the marriage can never be in conflict with the good of the other, we call them one flesh. The two persons become one body. What is good for the hand is good for the foot. What hurts the knee can never be good for the ear. They are one flesh, and the things that are good for them are things they each can have. This is the politics of love: not the calculation of how each partner can get a fair share out of life together in this world of scarcity, but the discernment of how the gifts they have been blessed with may be enjoyed for their mutual flourishing and the service of others.

This is what marriage gets down to. Not a zero-sum game, in which one person sacrifices his or her career, friends, creativity or deepest needs so that the other can be the hero, or the star, or never lose the argument. Instead, marriage is an adventure in which a new body can bring together what neither of two persons could have been apart. The only thing that might stop them would be the idea that they could somehow get there on their own. One other person is always more than enough, when you believe that that person will listen to you until you run out of things to say, when you trust that that person will wait for as long as it takes for you to understand why you are the way you are, when you realize that that person will always impute the best of motives to your actions, however clumsy you feel inside. You don’t need to grab the biggest piece of cake any more, because you are one body, and her eating it is as good as your eating it. You don’t have to have all the witty punch lines yourself any more, because it’s not a competition for attention that only one of you can win.

Marriages are as strong as our combined imaginations allow them to be. The key to the politics of love, the key to that limitless imagination that sees only abundance, that desires only the things that are not in short supply—that key lies in worship. For it is God that stretches and trains our imaginations, God’s creation that trains us to look on the world with astonishment and wonder, and God’s limitless love for us that

inspires us to imagine that we and others could begin to love like that.