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by Brenna Davis

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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.

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