

**THE WORD FROM GILEAD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**  
**September 27, 2020**

SCRIPTURE READING

Exodus 16:2-21

<sup>2</sup> The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. <sup>3</sup> The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of Yahweh in the land of Egypt, when we sat by pots of meat and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

<sup>4</sup> Then God said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not. <sup>5</sup> On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days." <sup>6</sup> So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "In the evening you shall know that it was Yahweh who brought you out of the land of Egypt, <sup>7</sup> and in the morning you shall witness the glory of God, the One who has heard your complaining. For what are we, that you complain against us?" <sup>8</sup> And Moses said, "When Yahweh gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, it is because Yahweh has heard your complaining—for who are we? Your complaining is not against us but against Yahweh."

<sup>9</sup> Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, 'Draw near to Yahweh, who has heard your complaining.'" <sup>10</sup> And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of God appeared in the cloud. <sup>11</sup> And Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, <sup>12</sup> "I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am your God.'"

<sup>13</sup> In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. <sup>14</sup> When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. <sup>15</sup> When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread that God has given you to eat. <sup>16</sup> This is what Yahweh has commanded: 'Gather as much of it as you need, a two-quart measure to each person according to the number of persons in your own tents.'" <sup>17</sup> The Israelites did so, some gathering more, some less. <sup>18</sup> But when they measured it with a two-quart measure, those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed. <sup>19</sup> And Moses said to them, "Let no one leave any of it over until morning." <sup>20</sup> But they did not listen to Moses; some left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and became foul. And Moses was angry with them. <sup>21</sup> Morning by morning they gathered it, as much as each needed; but when the sun grew hot, it melted away.

SCRIPTURE READING

Matthew 20:1-16

<sup>1</sup> "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for the vineyard. <sup>2</sup> After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, the owner sent them into the vineyard. <sup>3</sup> About nine o'clock, the owner went out, and seeing others standing idle in the marketplace, <sup>4</sup> said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went. <sup>5</sup> At about noon, and again at about three o'clock, the owner went out and did the same. <sup>6</sup> Still again at about five

o'clock the owner went out and found others standing around, and said to them, 'Why are you standing here idle all day?' <sup>7</sup> They replied, 'Because no one has hired us.' The owner said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard.' <sup>8</sup> When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to the manager, 'Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.' <sup>9</sup> When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. <sup>10</sup> Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. <sup>11</sup> And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, <sup>12</sup> saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' <sup>13</sup> But the owner replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage?' <sup>14</sup> Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. <sup>15</sup> Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?' <sup>16</sup> So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

SERMON

"Enough Already!"

Rev. Martin McGeachy

Hey, Yahweh, on behalf of humanity, regarding 2020— Enough Already! Certainly we all feel that way, but it's a dubious theology, the idea that God is specifically targeting us with blessing or punishment. I can't tell you all that God has planned or is doing, but I don't think God got out of bed in January and said, "You know what, there are a million or so people I'm ready to call home, so... COVID." That doesn't ring true for the God of Jesus, who will "judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity." (Psalms 98:9 )

If people are getting what they deserve, if there's really justice, I have a list of suggestions ready. Except that truthfully, if true justice were being meted out, I'd be in trouble, too. And you! We're all of us sinners, and "there is no one righteous, not one." (Romans 3:10–12; Psalm 14:1–3; Psalm 53:1–3) It rains on the just and the unjust, and beautiful people die too soon; unpleasant people sit in their castles on piles of gold imagining they're accomplishing something, and also lovely people thrive and mean people die too soon. God has created a world that is alternately affected by nature, random accidents, the carelessness and selfishness of humanity in the stewardship of the earth resulting in pollution and climate change; and yes, a world that allows evil and injustice to flourish if it chooses, and if we choose to be silent and allow it.

So where's the justice? We have all been judged, sheep and goats alike, and been found wanting, and offered grace. Forgiveness, undeserved, is ours if we choose to accept it and walk in the light. We are those workers who showed up at 5:59 p.m. and received a whole days' pay, even though we didn't earn it. We are the prodigal, who wasted their life in self-indulgent living, polluting their life and its resources, and has been welcomed home with open arms. "So quit your yapping and complaining, and eat your manna! There's children starving in China who would be happy to get your manna!" That's definitely the message of the parable of those who came late to the payroll. But there's a good bit more grace to it than that.

Right now, in 2020, we definitely have had it. Enough already! We've had enough challenge; it's time for some blessings! Maybe we felt blessed in 2019, but we don't feel that way now. Hey God, what have you done for me lately? "I dunno, gave you life when you woke up today? Forgave you yet AGAIN?" Sometimes we're called to feel grateful for the good we've been given and know it's enough. It's enough already.

One of the interesting things about the story of the laborers in the vineyard is that it's about workers who would have been completely satisfied with what they'd been given—they agreed with the boss about what they needed for the job—but then they perceived someone had more than they did, and suddenly they had disdain for their wage, and felt slighted. They deserved more! It's like a joyful child who finds a silver quarter under their pillow in exchange for a rotten tooth, and in happy excitement the child takes it to school to show it off, and the kid in the next desk says, "Look at the dollar I got for my tooth." And suddenly that first child looks at the shiny quarter and sees that it is Less Than, and now it only brings unhappiness. But the reverse is true. We can decide to concentrate on what we have and be grateful, even joyful about it, and choose not to compare our quarter to our neighbor's dollar. I know when I was a young pastor I used to fantasize about pastoring a church with a big building and a large facility, but now that I've watched big-church colleagues and their congregations labor to pay for all that real estate with shrinking tithes, I am loving our little cozy Gilead sanctuary more and more.

When I was in acting school, I had a friend who struggled to find himself as an artist, just as I did, and a few years later, when he got a job doing comedy bit parts on a national TV show, I was happy for him. I thought, "Good for him (and his little bits of comedy, his minor success)!" And then one day I went to a movie, and there was my friend 50 feet high, on the big screen with a big part. And I was out there in the dark. And I did not feel happy for him. But I got over it. I can't afford to spend energy being envious. True, I saw him just yesterday on a Netflix show that won an Emmy, and I had to do a little grace-check, but I really am happy with the life I chose.

Yes, I totally get the feeling of grumbling in the wilderness, complaining that we're in trouble: "Hey, I'm dying out here!" But trust that Yahweh has heard us and our constant grievances: "Yeah, I got that, O mortal; enough already!" We may feel like our desire for justice, kindness, grace, and equality in the world is impossible. Our relentless electronic inputs tell us so every day. But Yahweh can make manna out of morning dew, even though it can sometimes be hard to recognize it. The Hebrews almost missed it; the literal meaning of that word "manna" is, "What is it?" If they hadn't been told the miracle was about to happen, they'd have waded right through it, knocking it off their sandals, complaining that not only were they starving, now they had this mess to contend with every morning. I know we imagine that manna from heaven is mere myth, that water from a stone in the desert is just a story, but think right now about how often you have been nurtured in the hard times. Remember how often you've been saved when you thought all was lost. Yes, we've all prayed for things that haven't turned out the way we wanted, and so sometimes we believe that the good times are just dumb luck: to repeat a favorite joke of mind, there was the fellow with the sprained

ankle who had to pick up something at the store on a crowded afternoon, and was praying for a parking spot where he wouldn't have to walk far. He prayed over and over as he circled the lot, seeing spots only off in the distance, "Dear Lord, please help me to find a spot close to the door," and suddenly as he passed the entrance a third time, a car pulled out right up front, and the man said, "Oh, nevermind, God, I found one myself."

It's true that we pray for a lot that doesn't come to pass as we wanted, but that doesn't mean those prayers went unanswered; it means God answered them in ways either we didn't like, didn't recognize, or were unable to see the way God is putting the pieces of Light together because we lack God's vision. Maybe today we have to be satisfied with our daily wage of blessings and grace, and not grumble that everything else we want isn't playing out as we wish. The same grace is given to those rotten folks who don't deserve blessings like you and I do. Are we envious because of God's generosity towards them? I guarantee you there are folks out there envious of God's generosity towards you and me. "Eat your manna, and enjoy it!"

Have you ever gone to the grocery store to buy a juicy peach for your dinner, but they're buy-one/ get-one-free, and you know you only want one, but you can't not take a free one, so you do. And five days later you have fruit flies and mold because it spoiled. You've heard about spoiling children, which is frequently associated with parents giving them too much, so that they never learn empathy for the less fortunate, or the hard work and joy of earning something. It's just like manna that spoils if we gather too much.

Most of us actually enjoy helping others. But we've all had a friend we could describe as "needy." When you hear someone telling about another in their life who's needy, it's frequently in the context of why that other is about to be dropped from the friendship roster. I have a friend whose next door neighbor lost their spouse, and my friend reached out to offer comfort and aid, inviting them over for tea, listening to their sadness and offering suggestions for things that might make that person's grief ease a bit. But the neighbor never listened, and just continued to complain, month after month, calling at all hours to tell my friend how lousy life was. Finally, my friend had to step away.

Imagine how God feels! God gives us everything we NEED (not want, but need) for a fruitful life, and we demand more and more. Imagine you opened a bakery to provide enough bread to feed the entire world every single day, and you had seven billion people yelling at you in their prayers every day to give more. Like God, we are happy to help a friend in need, but friend, stop knocking on my door week after week if you don't intend to try to step into the light with me. "Don't feed that stray; it'll never leave."

Certainly God has infinite patience, and is always there waiting for us no matter how much we complain. But as to our complaints, in reality however much God gave us, we would want twice that. And if God doubled it every day, we'd still want twice that.

Famously wealthy Oprah Winfrey says: "The reason I've been able to be so financially successful is my focus has never, ever for one minute been money." "Be thankful for what you have; you'll end up having more. If you concentrate on what you don't have, you will never, ever have enough."

(Oprah Winfrey, <https://www.inc.com/peter-economy/oprah-winfrey-19-inspiring-power-quotes-for-success.html>)

What do the people in our Old Testament lesson have in common with the New Testament lesson? Complaining about what they've been given. Not enough, not fair. As long as we're looking at our neighbor and thinking they got a better deal, we will never get to the light. We will never have enough. Remember this commandment? "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." (Exodus 20:17) That's commandment #10, the last of the ten, but in the world of last and first, that makes it commandment #1, at least in terms of our gratitude list. Decide you have enough already.

The story as Jesus tells it ends with a question for the early workers. The employer tells them to be satisfied with what they've received, and then, "or are you going to choose to feel like you haven't been given enough?" And because we don't hear any more about those characters, we are left with the impression that this is a "tough luck" lesson for them. "Oh well. You get what you get and you don't get upset." But what if the story is really good news for them? For all we know, they went away realizing they were blessed with enough, thinking, "Well, by golly, good for old Shadrach over there who napped all morning and showed up at 4:45 and still got paid. Thank goodness there's someone around still hiring."

This is a happy ending story, if we choose for it to be. "The last will be first, and the first will be last." (v.16) Maybe we've been feeling like we were last, and we suddenly realize the line of blessings has been reversed, and we're number one! Remember that among the gifts you have been given today are faith and hope. Continue to have faith to hope, and hope for faith. Like manna in the wilderness, it will come if we seek it with a receiving heart.

Amen.