

Exodus 16:2-15 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

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

⁴Then the LORD 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. ⁵On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days." ⁶So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "In the evening you shall know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, ⁷and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your complaining against the LORD. For what are we, that you complain against us?" ⁸And Moses said, "When the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the LORD has heard the complaining that you utter against him—what are we? Your complaining is not against us but against the LORD."

⁹Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, 'Draw near to the LORD, for he has heard your complaining.'" ¹⁰And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. ¹¹The LORD spoke to Moses and said, ¹²"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 the LORD your God.'"

¹³In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. ¹⁴When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. ¹⁵When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?"^[a] For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat."

The Laborers in the Vineyard

20 “For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. ²After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage,^[a] he sent them into his vineyard. ³When he went out about nine o’clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; ⁴and he said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went. ⁵When he went out again about noon and about three o’clock, he did the same. ⁶And about five o’clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, ‘Why are you standing here idle all day?’ ⁷They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard.’ ⁸When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, ‘Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.’ ⁹When those hired about five o’clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage.^[b] ¹⁰Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage.^[c] ¹¹And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, ¹²saying, ‘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.’ ¹³But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage?’^[d] ¹⁴Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. ¹⁵Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?’^[e] ¹⁶So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”^[f]

September 24, 2017

Exodus 16:2-15; Matthew 20:1-16

God's Economy - Enough

Kerra Becker English

“Mo - om – there’s nothing in the fridge to eat.” She says staring at leftovers, and fruit, and a full gallon of milk that could be used on any one of the four boxes of cereal in the cupboard.

Mom answers – I know, I’m going to the store tomorrow.

How much is ENOUGH?

The Israelites complain to Moses. “We had all we wanted in Egypt. Why did you bring us out into the wilderness, to kill us with hunger?”

Moses answers – I know, I’ll talk to God about it, and God will provide what we need.

How much is ENOUGH?

CEO pay has grown 90 times as fast as worker pay since 1978 according to the research of the Economic Policy Institute, a think tank associated with keeping low income workers in mind when making public policy. According to research conducted by the National Low Income Housing Coalition, in no state in America is a person able to afford to rent a median range two-bedroom apartment by working a federal standard minimum wage job. (CNBC)

How much is ENOUGH?

The laborers in the vineyard all get a fair day's wages whether they start early in the morning or late in the afternoon. It's the vineyard owner's prerogative to take care of these workers. "Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?" And yet the workers who spent all day in the sun grumble about the fairness of their pay.

How much is ENOUGH?

How much is enough? When do we have enough food, enough shelter, AND enough freedom? How much pay is enough to feel honored and respected as the CEO of a company? How much pay is enough if you do the same job as someone else, but for 76% of the pay, or 67% of the pay, comparing the average pay of white men to white or black women in the same jobs? How much is enough in God's kingdom?

That's the question of the day. How much is enough in God's kingdom? How God defines "enough," and how God defines "fairness" might be quite different from how we do. Enough in the Exodus text is meat and bread to last the day. Enough in the Matthew text is receiving a daily wage – whether you were hired early or late. Neither of those accommodations by God take into account how much complaining there was, how hard or how long one worked, or if there should be a difference or not between what people are given for any of those reasons. In God's economy, displaced refugees don't starve, and day laborers are blessed by the generosity of the land owner.

Under this definition of "enough," I am covered, and then some. My refrigerator is full – even if we happen to be out of cheese sticks and the milk is running low. Our family's income, which

includes both mine and my husband's, is definitely enough to meet our day to day needs – even if, as our daughter aptly pointed out on Friday night, we have a boring canoe and not a cool pontoon boat to use on the lake. Just saying that we spent Friday night on the lake is probably a marker that we have more than enough. In God's economy, we have no reason to complain, but still might do so, occasionally, just like the Israelites in the desert or the early morning laborers of Jesus' parable. As many times as we have heard about God's desire to provide for humankind, and looked out on the abundance of creation, we human beings are so inclined to look at the glass as at LEAST half empty. The complaining goes around, and around, and around, so much so that what is happening in these biblical stories has far from gone away. God gives us enough, but for us it's never enough.

But we also know that sometimes the resources of this world really aren't disbursed evenly enough or generously enough. I find the widening graph between the haves and the have nots in our own first world country deeply disturbing, and both ends of the spectrum are likely suffering because of it. Actor Jim Carey, known both for his comedy and his highly acclaimed role in the movie *"The Truman Show"* has said, "I think everybody should get rich and famous and do everything they ever dreamed of so they can see that it's not the answer." The glorification of "more" comes at a high human cost – for everyone.

Biblical ethics reminds us often and in a myriad of ways that we are lovingly responsible for our neighbor's well-being, and that being only "out for ourselves" is neither sustainable, nor desirable. It is as good for the giver to give as it is for the receiver to receive. It is a reminder that all that we have comes from God in the form of this abundant planet, and sometimes what we are able to make of our lot is more closely related to fate derived from the good or bad fortune of birth and the subsequent accessibility of opportunity. The Bible makes us painfully aware of

these truths, and it has harsh words for those who would ignore the needs of our fellow human beings. The parable of the sheep and the goats – also in Matthew’s gospel is the perfect example of this. For all to have enough, we must be bold enough to see when someone is hungry or thirsty or naked or in prison, and then care enough and act accordingly to begin to remedy such situations.

Both our eyes and our actions are needed. When did we SEE you? Is also - When did we do something about it? That something might be the immediate charity of helping someone who is holding up a cardboard sign in the median, and it might be the ongoing striving for public policy that works toward an economy of needs being met for all. How much is enough? In this case – more – may actually be the best answer. More kindness, more justice, being more tuned in to the plight of our neighbor whose paycheck always seems to leave her short on her electric bill or the plight of our friend whose temporary unemployment leaves his family without health insurance. We may even have to nudge our friend with means to see with open eyes and become generous with the resources that can always be seen as more gift than earnings.

That’s the rub of this parable, isn’t it? The generosity of the landowner to pay what was needed rather than what the “work” was worth, makes us uncomfortable. We have been taught a different narrative from scripture that people earn their pay and deserve what’s coming to them. But I know some teachers who might disagree. As a bunch, many of them work themselves way beyond their hours in the classroom, and their salaries haven’t jumped by 90% over the past 40 years, far from it. And if you want an even snarkier example from the Internet, I saw a post that included a stereotypical picture of an African woman with the jar of water on her head that said, “If we were to get paid by how hard we work, African women would be the best paid people on the planet.” We have assigned value to careers, and education, and hard work, when God does

something different. God assigns value to life. Think about that for just a minute. God cares about the kid standing in front of the suburban refrigerator with nothing to eat, and God cares about the kid living in public housing waiting for school lunch so he will have something to eat. God wants all of us, and I mean all of us, to have enough. For some that will be a blessing that raises them up, and for some it will be an indictment that requires them to give more. When God shows up – there will be enough. And when there isn't enough – God shows up there too as we weep together. How much is enough? Enough will be exactly what sustains us for today. Amen.