

Rev. Dr. Craig Howard
“The Gift of Enough”
First Presbyterian Church of Kirkwood
Sunday, September 20, 2020

Exodus 16:2-15

The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The 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.’

Then 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. On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days.’ So 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, and 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?’ And 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.’

Then Moses said to Aaron, ‘Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, “Draw near to the LORD, for he has heard your complaining.”’ And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked towards the wilderness, and the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. The LORD spoke to Moses and said, ‘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.”’

In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. 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. 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 the LORD has given you to eat.’

Matthew 20:1-16

‘For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the labourers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o’clock, he saw others standing idle in the market-place; and he said to them, “You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.” So they went. When he went out again about noon and about three o’clock, he did the same. And 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?” They said to him, “Because no one has hired us.” He said to them, “You also go into the vineyard.” When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, “Call the labourers

and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.” When those hired about five o’clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, 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.” But he replied to one of them, “Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?” So the last will be first, and the first will be last.’

The only thing in this life that is certain is uncertainty. This saying is especially true during these times. We are experiencing change and transition in our culture, society, and church, at a very rapid pace. Today is the first Sunday without David Holyan as Pastor of First Kirkwood. Today is the first step into a new future for First Kirkwood. Pastors come and go. Serving for a time and a season with a congregation. Pastors develop close relationships within congregations during their time of ministry, which makes the goodbyes really, really hard. Sometimes change comes about with a well-made plan and with various checkpoints of preparation. And sometimes, life happens to us.

David going on disability was not in the plan. But our job is to make the best of what life gives us--to make sure he is able to land on his feet--to make sure the church is able to move forward beyond his ministry here at First Kirkwood. The Presbytery's Ethical Boundaries Policy discourages continued pastoral relationships with former congregations by former pastors. Now, this uncomfortable policy is necessary to facilitate preparing for relationships with a coming, new pastor. And even though I fully support such presbytery policies, it's hard. It's hard because we're human. It's hard because we care, and relationships have mattered to everyone very much. Now, this does not mean that you cannot call or visit David. It does not mean that David and Jani have to sever friendships and long-term relationships with you, no. It just means that you should give them a break from worrying about what is happening at this church. Give David space to heal. Allow him to let go and move on with his new life.

Now, there's always a range of emotions when there's any kind of pastoral transition. Sadness, we're saying goodbye to a pastor who has served for some 14 years. Anger, with the timing and relief for some that a pastor is moving on. There may be anxiety about choosing the next pastor. David was here for a long time, and it's been a long time since you had to go through the pastor nominating process. Some may even wonder how the congregation go on, and who the next pastor will be, or how the next pastor will lead and serve and whether he or she will be a good fit, or are we just going to have to tolerate the person. No matter the circumstances, goodbyes are hard. So, it's okay to feel whatever your feeling about this pastoral transition, be it sadness, be it anger, be it relief, be it anxiety, or all of the above. But I want you to know, my siblings in Jesus Christ, you are going to be okay. You really are.

Now, I believe that God has a word for us today from our scripture lessons. I actually want to start by sharing that my heart was broken on Friday night when I heard the news of the death of Supreme Court Judge, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Justice Ginsburg who was also known as RBG to the young people, spent her life coming to the aid of women who were victimized by society. And she made sure that the law was equally applied to them as well. She pushed for equality in the workplace, equality in education, equality for rights for women. And although we're not there yet, we're much better because of the work that she did. Justice Ginsburg was especially admired by young women. An article in *The Atlantic* magazine in early 2019 said this about the phenomenon of young girls being

attracted to Justice Ginsburg quote, "Today more than ever, women stars from models of female influence, authenticity, dignity, and voice hold up an octogenarian justice as the embodiment of hope for an empowered future." An embodiment of hope for an empowered future," end of quotes. These young women along with all of us are challenged to continue the fight for freedom and justice modeled by the John Lewis' and Ruth Bader Ginsburgs' of this world. In our parable, the landowner also believes in justice and righteousness. He tells each of the workers, "Go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right." The landowner is committed to being fair and paying a day's wages to those who work. At the end of the day, the landowner did as he promised. He calls his manager in and has all of the laborers lined up as he distributes the wages, but an interesting thing happens. Instead of hearing thanks, and appreciation, and gratitude for an opportunity to work and earn a living, the landowner hears complaints. Instead of contentment, there's grumbling and dissatisfaction.

Now, complaining is nothing new in the Bible and nothing new in the church. In our first lesson, the people of Israel have left Egypt, and they're in the wilderness and they're hot, and they're uncomfortable, and they're hungry, and they don't have any food. Their response is to complain to Moses, "Why would you bring us out of Egypt? For what? We could die in the wilderness." Now, here's the surprise. As we read scriptures, we find that God actually welcomes complaints. There's a category in the Book of Psalms called laments and these psalms of lament. These psalms of lament are prayers of complaint that people make to God. In these prayers, people tell God exactly how they feel. They say things like, "How long, oh God, will you forget me? How long will you hide your face from me?" Even Jesus quoted Psalm 22 as he was dying on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" These laments talk about how wicked people are being oppressive and how God needs to calm and straighten these evil folks out. They cry out for deliverance, these people who are without power. The people who are on the bottom of society without the ability to defend themselves. These people cry out for God to stop the wicked, defeat the wicked, even kill the wicked and come to their aid. These are prayers of lament and these are prayers of protest. These people are crying out that what is happening is not fair, it is not right, it is not just and, God, you need to make it right. So, God gives us space to express our discontent, to complain, to lament, but unlike the complaints in our first lesson or the complaints in the Psalms, the people complaining in the parable are complaining for a different reason. They didn't complain because they were hungry or because they did not have enough. These workers complained because although they had enough, they wanted more. Unlike the complaints in the Book of Psalms where wicked people were oppressing and terrorizing the Psalmist, these people complained because they didn't get an advantage. They didn't get more. They didn't get what they felt they deserved. In his book entitled *Enough*, John Bogle, the creator of Vanguard Mutual Funds, tells this story.

At a party given by a billionaire on Shelter Island, Kurt Vonnegut informs his pal, Joseph Heller, that their host, a hedge fund manager had made more money in a single day than Heller had earned from his wildly popular novel, *Catch-22*, in the entire history of the selling of that novel. Heller responded, "Yes, but I have something that he will never have. I have enough."

The Book of Proverbs says that the leech has two daughters, more and more. The landowner in our parable operated in God's economy, not our economy. It did not matter when the day began. The landowner paid a day's wage. Who knows why some people were early in the marketplace? Perhaps they learned that the early bird gets the worm, or perhaps someone told them about the job. Someone had inside information, inside knowledge to give them a leg up on others. Who knows why some were still standing idly by in the marketplace late in the afternoon? Perhaps no

one wanted to give them a chance because of their gender or because of the color of their skin. Perhaps they'd already worked for someone else and wasn't given enough of a wage, so they had to return to the marketplace in hopes of being hired, in the hopes of making enough to care for their family.

It did not matter when they began. It did not matter why they were in the marketplace early or arrived later in the afternoon. The landowner made the same promise to all of them, "I will pay you what is right." We live in an economy where some people earn much more or much less than others. The pandemic has put a spotlight on an essential worker's class. Some people are high-paying physicians or groundbreaking scientists while others are the janitors who have to clean up or be the grocery stock person who has to just stock the shelves. Some strive to make ends meet working two jobs just to pay rent and to put food on the table. But God's economy is different. The kingdom of God is about everyone having what they need. It is about people being paid a fair wage. It is about everyone being provided for. God's economy is about having enough.

I wonder if Jesus is trying to teach us something, something we need to hear in this culture of maximizing returns and market speculation and profit-seeking. Perhaps instead of reaching for the more or the newer or the bigger, Jesus wants us to be content with what we have. Instead of seeking God's abundance, Jesus may want us to realize that we have enough. We may not have even what we had, but what we have is enough to do what God wants us to do: enough resources, enough staff, enough space, enough people. We have enough to be the church that God wants us to be in this community, in this mission field. And when we realize that we have enough, that God has listened to us and provided for us, then we will also find that we have more to share with others. It's okay to give away when we have enough. It's okay to give more when we have enough. We can be a caring community for those inside the building and bring caring to the city of Kirkwood as well. The gift of enough. Amen.