

Exodus 16:2-15

2 The whole Israelite community complained against Moses and Aaron in the desert. 3 The Israelites said to them, "Oh, how we wish that the Lord had just put us to death while we were still in the land of Egypt. There we could sit by the pots cooking meat and eat our fill of bread. Instead, you've brought us out into this desert to starve this whole assembly to death."

4 Then the Lord said to Moses, "I'm going to make bread rain down from the sky for you. The people will go out each day and gather just enough for that day. In this way, I'll test them to see whether or not they follow my Instruction. 5 On the sixth day, when they measure out what they have collected, it will be twice as much as they collected on other days." 6 So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "This evening you will know that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt. 7 And in the morning you will see the Lord's glorious presence, because your complaints against the Lord have been heard. Who are we? Why blame us?" 8 Moses continued, "The Lord will give you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning because the Lord heard the complaints you made against him. Who are we? Your complaints aren't against us but against the Lord."

9 Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole Israelite community, 'Come near to the Lord, because he's heard your complaints.'" 10 As Aaron spoke to the whole Israelite community, they turned to look toward the desert, and just then the glorious presence of the Lord appeared in the cloud.

11 The Lord spoke to Moses, 12 "I've heard the complaints of the Israelites. Tell them, 'At twilight you will eat meat. And in the morning you will have your fill of bread. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God.'"

13 In the evening a flock of quail flew down and covered the camp. And in the morning there was a layer of dew all around the camp. 14 When the layer of dew lifted, there on the desert surface were thin flakes, as thin as frost on the ground. 15 When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, "What[b] is it?" They didn't know what it was.

Moses said to them, "This is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat."

Matthew 20:1-16

“The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. 2 After he agreed with the workers to pay them a denarion,[a] he sent them into his vineyard.

3 “Then he went out around nine in the morning and saw others standing around the marketplace doing nothing. 4 He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and I’ll pay you whatever is right.’ 5 And they went.

“Again around noon and then at three in the afternoon, he did the same thing. 6 Around five in the afternoon he went and found others standing around, and he said to them, ‘Why are you just standing around here doing nothing all day long?’

7 “‘Because nobody has hired us,’ they replied.

“He responded, ‘You also go into the vineyard.’

8 “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, ‘Call the workers and give them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and moving on finally to the first.’ 9 When those who were hired at five in the afternoon came, each one received a denarion. 10 Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more. But each of them also received a denarion. 11 When they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, 12 ‘These who were hired last worked one hour, and they received the same pay as we did even though we had to work the whole day in the hot sun.’

13 “But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I did you no wrong. Didn’t I agree to pay you a denarion? 14 Take what belongs to you and go. I want to give to this one who was hired last the same as I give to you. 15 Don’t I have the right to do what I want with what belongs to me? Or are you resentful because I’m generous?’ 16 So those who are last will be first. And those who are first will be last.”

Sermon

Lord, open my lips and my mouth with declare your praise.

Lord open our hearts, and our lives will sing out your name. Amen.

“It’s my money and I want it now! Call J.G. Wentworth!

877-CASH-NOW!” How insidious is that commercial? Not only the jingle, which sticks in my brain like casseroles stick to your ribs.

But the content just trains us to expect certain things. It’s my money and I want it now. That’s the way of our world, isn’t it? We treat our bank accounts, credit cards, mortgages, savings, not just as money, but *my* money.

But is it our money? Do we truly own what sits in our bank accounts? Do we truly own the structures in which we live, the cars that we drive the screens that occupy so much of our time? We have the deeds and receipts, so according to United States law, we do own them. But as people given new life by Christ, as creatures of our world’s creator, how do we view possessions? To

whom to does our wealth belong? “It’s my money and I want it now” is the way of his world, but it’s not the method of the kingdom of god.

Yesterday I spent about six hours parking cars for the VT football game to raise money for campus ministry. And here’s the thing about our parking scheme. We charge the first people who show up \$10 to park, which by the way, is the best deal in town. The next lowest is \$15 and it’s much further away, and VT lots are all at least \$20. So our \$10 price is already an incredible deal for those first people that arrive. Do you know what we charge the last people show up? We charge them \$10 too. We don’t vary the price on how long they’re in the lot, how many times they use the bathrooms, how much garbage their tailgating creates, how big their truck is, how much space their tailgate takes up, or anything like that. They’re all charged \$10. No one questions this practice of equality in that little vineyard of ours, largely because we’re all of

the same kind that day. We've got one football related goal, and no matter if you're a VT local or ODU fan, no matter if you're a daylong tailgater or a last minute arriver, we all know that the same amount is fair and that being fair is enough. If we understand that when we're paying someone for a simple service, why would we expect different from a landowner hiring us to work in her fields? Why would we expect special treatment from God when equality is good enough for gameday?

Perhaps we'll all remember this from confirmation, but to review, Martin Luther had a very clear view on our possessions and equality. None of it is ours. We're all temporary stewards of the gifts we're given. Since those gifts belong ultimately to God, they ought to serve God's purposes and not our own. In the Small Catechism, Luther said it this way: "I believe that...God gave to me: body and soul, eyes, ears, and all the other parts of my body, my mind and all my senses and preserves them as well. God gives me

clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and land, spouse and children, fields, animals, and all I own. Every day God abundantly provides everything I need to nourish this body and life...God does all this because of pure, fatherly, and divine goodness and mercy, not because I've earned it or deserved it. For all of this, I must thank, praise, serve, and obey God."

What do you have that you deserve because you've earned it? Not deserve in terms of the American industrial complex. Not in society. Not with your family or friends. Cosmically. What does the universe owe you for the way you've lived? What does God owe you for the things you've done? Let's be tragically honest. Nothing. That's one of the mysterious wonders of God creating the universe throughout these billions of years. Without the Lord's hand guiding life into existence, without the Lord's breath blowing the right atoms across the vacuum of space into the right place at the right

time for a big bang to produce little old us, then what would we be but dust in the wind?

The ways that we talk about recompense in our day to day lives assumes that, no matter what we have, we've earned it. We deserve it. I get so weary of this talk, because it seems we're all constantly trying to elbow our way up a social ladder that doesn't exist with God. That's why my favorite thing to hear when I see a familiar face and ask how they're doing, is simply, "Better than I deserve." What wisdom is contained in four simple words! So many of us are so blessed with what we have in this world. We have so much more than we've earned. Many of us, most of us here in this country, are truly better off than we deserve.

Then why are we so unhappy? So dissatisfied? So worried about getting our money and getting it now? It's because, I believe, we're like workers hired early in this parable. We view the equality of God's gifts with disdain rather than joy because we've

defined fairness as though it's a wage God owes us rather than a gift God's shared with us. We've somehow transferred the logic of capitalism into the context of God's Kingdom, where it just doesn't belong. God intends to be generous with everyone, making sure that all have what they need not just to survive, but to thrive.

The entire concept of deserving is, itself, a self-centered concept. It's focused on what we get rather than what we need. When we focus on what we deserve, we entirely ignore the needs of those around us. That's what we see in these dissatisfied field hands. They're focused on what they think they should get, not the hunger of their neighbors' children. Not their coworkers' rent payment. When we focus on deserving, we're not actually focused on church, on Jesus, on mission, on the life of discipleship.

“Or are you resentful because I'm generous?” That's the question that shoots to the heart, at least to my heart. I like getting what I think I deserve because, at times, I think I deserve more

than I get. So when we see someone who's done less receive the same reward as us, we feel disenfranchised. But what we must recognize is that we all don't need the same level of generosity. The people who the master invites to work later in the day still have not found work, and they still have families to feed. Those jobless would-be workers are no different than the Israelites, wandering in the wilderness and wondering from where their next meal might come. At the end of the day, the master provides to everyone manna in the form of a paycheck that isn't extravagant but is enough for everyone to have what they need. **We are all wanderers in the wilderness, fearful and hungry and doubting God's goodness. And yet, every morning there is bread from God's hand.**

In his last words, Luther found this spirit as well: "We are all beggars, this is true." However, we need not all beg for the same amount, so we who've worked all day should not demand more

recompense from God, as though we deserve it. We ought not resent God's generosity to others who need it, especially when we don't need it. The kind of hateful speech used against those who need food stamps or Medicare/Medicaid or disability assistance is just such a sin. We see the same sin in the church when we hear complaining about money that churches spend outside themselves, whether for emergency assistance or outreach ministries. To complain about God providing for others when we've already got more than enough is to resent our Lord because of that divine generosity.

It's not our money, even if we want it now. All that we have is a gift from God. And all of our attempts to prove exceptions just reveals our own misunderstanding of the world. We do not deserve what good we have. But we have it anyway, thanks be to God. We are all doing better than we deserve. Let's be clear that this lack of deserving isn't an assault on our preciousness. We,

formed by supply and demand, might conclude that if we deserve nothing, then we're worth nothing. That is a heinous lie. We still receive, even though we deserve nothing, and that is a highlight of God's graciousness. That we're so beloved by God when we don't deserve emphasizes just how valuable God considers us to be. It's good news, the best news, that God doesn't judge us by what we deserve. Precisely because we don't deserve, that means anything we receive is a gift. No matter if it's more or less than someone else received, we don't deserve it, whether it is our salvation or our daily bread. But God desires to share it with us anyway.

Some sermons are easier to give because there's a clear message of Gospel and a clear action of discipleship. This isn't one of those sermons. There is certainly a clear message of Gospel: God gives us what we need to survive in this world, the food that we eat, the income we receive, the homes and tools and cars and smartphones and friends and family and love and purpose and the

whole host of good things, from the least to the greatest are all gifts from God. That's nice. That's Gospel. But the discipleship stuff here is much, much harder.

The very next sentences in the passages from Exodus remind the Israelites not to hoard the manna. There's more than enough for everyone, so to take more than you need only says one thing: you don't trust God to provide tomorrow. Jesus takes this a step further with the parable. We ought to celebrate God's generosity with others, especially with those that we believe deserve it less than us, because God's generosity is meant for everyone and not just us. So the discipleship move here is hard, because it's not a go and do likewise teaching. It's a "God's flipping your world on it's head, on your head, and it's a good thing even if you don't believe it, so learn to love it" teaching. Because everyone coming into God's kingdom will get the same gift. There's no hierarchy. No advancement for time served. No special considering for the

people we've evangelized, baptisms performed, worship services attended. The kingdom is built on this radical equality: if you're a part of it, you get it all. No exceptions. No exclusions.

Ultimately, this is a parable for us, to remind us that God's going to love people - new people, different people - just the way God loved us and give them exactly what we need. That might mean they get more than us, and that's not just ok. That's a reason to celebrate. Will we be resentful because God is generous? God, I hope not. Amen.