

LECTIONARY REFLECTIONS PROPER 20A

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Exodus 16:2-15

Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45

Philippians 1:21-30

Matthew 20:1-16

Exodus 16:2-15

What is it? That is the loose translation of the word “Manna,” because the Israelites asked this question when it appeared. What is this thing that God has provided when we have complained about being hungry? The Israelites have been on the journey for a while, wandering in the desert. As human beings are wont to do when tasks become long and arduous, they are beginning to think about the past nostalgically. They are beginning to wish that they could return to their days of slavery in Egypt. Yes, it was hard to be enslaved, but at least then they had shelter. At least then they had food; and some of it was quite good! Our minds sometimes are not very good at remembering hardships for what they really were. Sometimes the present seems so difficult to us that we would easily trade it for our veiled and foggily remembered pasts. And then God provides us with what we need – strength for the journey, food for the road. But often we don’t recognize God’s provision for what it is. Often when it presents itself, we ask, “What is it?” ***Manna!***

What difficulty are you facing in your life? Do you find yourself wanting to complain against someone, even God? Do you find yourself looking on times past; even though they were difficult, as preferable to the times God has given you today? What is God providing for you as strength for the journey? Do you recognize it for what it is?

Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45

If you look through this Psalm, you will notice a number of imperative commands:

- **GIVE** thanks to the LORD
- **CALL** upon his Name
- **MAKE KNOWN** his deeds
- **SING** to Him
- **GLORY** in His Holy Name
- **LET** hearts rejoice
- **SEARCH** for the LORD, **SEEK** His face
- **REMEMBER...**

The Israelites are commanded to remember God’s deliverance of them from slavery. We too are commanded to remember all the ways God has delivered us. This is a Psalm for all people because God has done wondrous things for all of humanity. All are His beloved children. God has provided for everyone.

What has God done for you that you are compelled to remember? How has He provided for you throughout your life? If you were to make known his deeds, sing to Him, glory in His name, what would your song sound like? What are the ways in which you search for God?

Philippians 1:21-30

In this letter, Paul exhorts all Christians to lead productive lives. He reminds us that living in the flesh can be fruitful labor. Humans long to be productive and to produce things with their lives that have lasting, meaningful impacts on the world. Paul himself feels an obligation to remain bodily present for the sake of the Philippians. He exhorts them (and us) to stand firm in one spirit, to strive side by side, with one mind for the sake of the Gospel, to embrace unity and solidarity. Paul acknowledges the temptation to leave the bodily life so as to see Christ face to face, but that instead God wants him to suffer for the sake of Christ and for the sake of his brothers and sisters. Suffering can often have redemptive power, and if so, it is a privilege to suffer on behalf of Christ.

Can you think of times in your life where suffering may have been productive – labor before the birth of a child, sacrifice in order to put that child through college and then to see him or her successful, spending hours in prayer on behalf of someone and then to see that person blessed by God? While we live in our bodies, on this Earth, we are called to hard work for the sake of Christ, and it is a privilege! We all depend on the work and suffering of each other. How beautiful to be able to strive side by side with other Christians for the sake of Christ.

Matthew 20:-16

Jesus has just counseled those who would follow him that they must give up everything. He has instructed an enquirer to sell all he has and give to the poor. He has told his followers not to look back to what they have left but to turn resolutely to him. When Peter challenges him by saying that he and the other disciples have done just that, he (Peter) is perhaps expecting that Jesus will praise him. Instead Jesus tells this parable which is a parable of God's generosity justly and fairly administered. The only problem is that most people listening to this story would not label it a story of justice and fairness. What kind of fair employer pays people who have only worked an hour at the end of the day as much as people who have worked a full day in the heat?! How is THAT fair?! Jesus exhorts all of us to refrain from idleness. He gives all of us an opportunity to be productive and fruitful, because the opposite is not acceptable. He matches his generosity to our need. If we need to be employed at the end of the day, he is generous and faithful. If we need to work all day long, he makes that possible as well. The bottom line, however, is that we are not to question the difference. This is not a contest of comparison. This is Kingdom justice. This is Kingdom generosity. And apparently, given our own standards of justice and fairness, we can't possibly understand God's.

This parable invites us to free ourselves from the yoke of competitive comparison. We are to embrace the idea that God gives us exactly what we need. It is not a matter of giving something to us and taking it away from someone else. It is not a matter of taking what we need and giving it to someone else. God's world is not a Zero-Sum Game world. It is not a matter of our having to win by having someone else lose. There is room in God's system for everyone to win. How has God given you exactly what you need?

COLLECT:

Grant us, Lord, not to be anxious about earthly things, but to love things heavenly; and even now, while we are placed among things that are passing away, to hold fast to those that shall endure; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.