

Davidson College Presbyterian Church
Davidson, North Carolina
Robert Alexander
“Enough is Enough”
Exodus 16:1-5, 22-26 and Philippians 4:8-13
14th Sunday after Pentecost
July 9, 2017

Introduction to OT Scripture

When Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt they left quickly and took very little food with them. It wasn't long after their escape that they began to feel the effects of hunger and had to wonder how they were going to find food to eat. We pick up their story at the moment that their hunger turns to panic.

Read Exodus 16:1-5, 22-26

Or Watch <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21K55IsS2jE>

Introduction to Scripture

Many scholars call Paul's letter to the Philippians the letter of joy. Indeed there is much about joy in these four short chapters. "Rejoice in the Lord always!" Paul wrote these words from a prison cell to a church community that was experiencing persecution. And Paul invited this church to see beyond their struggle and to trust in God's abundant grace and steadfast love. In this morning's text Paul shares the secret about how he is able to maintain this perspective even in the midst of suffering.

Read Philippians 4:8-13

You may be familiar with what is commonly known as the *Serenity Prayer* – "Lord, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference."

At the beginning of Adam Hamilton's book entitled Enough, there is a similar prayer.

"Lord, help me to be grateful for what I have,
To remember that I don't need most of what I want,
And that joy is found in simplicity and generosity!"
Hamilton calls this the *Contentment Prayer*.

In this morning's text from Exodus, we see a lot more **discontent** than contentment. The Israelites were in the wilderness after a miraculous deliverance from Pharaoh and his armies through the Red Sea. Their stomachs had begun to grumble and they started to complain to Moses and to his brother Aaron..."If only we had died while we were in Egypt when we sat and ate our fill. But you've brought us out here to kill us with hunger!"

There are plenty of times when the scriptures describe God's anger and frustration with the people but this isn't one of those times. The text simply says that God told Moses that Bread from Heaven was going to come down for the people. Chapter 16 goes on to describe this bread, how it will arrive, and how the people are to collect it. There would be enough for each family each day and no more. The people would have to trust that God would give them heavenly bread again the next day because whatever they gathered that they couldn't eat would spoil. On Friday, there would be enough manna for people to gather two days' worth so that they could observe the Sabbath and rest. If they didn't plan for the Sabbath then they would be hungry.

The hunger of the people is a real need that God wants to meet. That is the first thing that we learn from this story. God desires to provide for the needs of God's people. God delivered the Israelites in order to shape them into a holy nation...not to kill them with hunger in the desert. There are so many times in our own lives when we cannot see how the plan of God will unfold in our lives and we lose faith. We cry out and complain and perhaps even question God's faithfulness. Old Testament scholar Terrence Fretheim suggests that Israel's food crisis led to a faith crisis.¹ I wonder how often that happens in our lives. Does our faith in God waiver when things don't go the way we think they should?

You may know that our Nicaragua Mission Team recently returned from visiting our partners in Kilambe, Nicaragua. As you may imagine, the people of Kilambe don't have much in comparison to what we are used to here in Davidson. Most of them don't have electricity, although some have solar units that give them some power. Electricity is slowly making its way up the mountain. By the time we go back next year all of the communities may have it. The people don't have indoor plumbing. They cook with wood, they bathe with cold water, they sit on wooden benches and get around mostly by foot. But they have a deep faith that keeps their trust in God strong. When a need arises the first thing they do is go to God in prayer. I would say that around here - in places where there is more affluence - it is more common for us to look to our own resources...our bank accounts...our credit cards...our abilities than it is to pray. Sometimes we forget that God wants to provide for the needs of God's people. But maybe that is because most of us have what we need. Perhaps what we need to pray more about is help in discerning the difference between wants and needs.

The late Millard Fuller, founder of Habitat for Humanity, once wrote, "We have confused, as a society, wants and needs, and a lot of people have raised up their wants way above their needs and way above their abilities to support all those wants."ⁱⁱ

When this happens, we irrationally purchase things that we don't need...a bigger house...a second house...a newer car...a new phone...another wardrobe. We eat out more than we need to and try and support more and more expensive habits. We spend more on ourselves and share less. We don't do our part to support God's work or to help make sure that others have enough because that money is tied up in mortgages, payment plans, vacations, and credit card debt. None of these things are necessarily wrong in and of themselves but we need to be honest about them. Number one - many of them are not needs. These things we do, we do because we want to and not because we need to. Number two - when we use our resources in this way it can become a burden that gradually weighs us down and lessens our ability to be generous and to share with others. Like the rich young ruler, we may find ourselves sad at our inability to follow Jesus faithfully because we are so attached to our wealth.

Several year ago I went to a mission conference and we were given the opportunity to go without lunch for a day. We had paid for that lunch in our registration so the conference was going to donate the funds that were saved to a hunger relief organization. Now - there were over 18,000 people at this conference and I think about 12,000 people decided to skip lunch that day. At \$5 a pop - I think we raised over \$60,000 to help fight hunger. Not bad for one lunch!

What if you skipped lunch once a week and intentionally gave that \$5 to a worthy cause? In one year you could share \$260. Or maybe for health reasons it isn't a good idea to skip meals...so instead of buying the extra pair of shoes that you don't really need, you decide to buy a pair of shoes to give to the local homeless shelter for someone in need or to support the work of Samaritan's Feet who gives shoes away to children who need them. Or maybe instead of upgrading that car or that boat or that bike you decide that what you have is just fine and instead you're going to make a donation to Ada Jenkins to help provide bus fare for the working poor who struggle to find the funds to even get to their minimum wage job each day.

Well why should I be concerned about any of that, you may ask? The Exodus story also teaches us about the importance of community and about everyone getting what they need. When the Israelites went out to gather manna in the morning they were to gather enough for each person in their tent for that day. God provided enough for everyone to get what they needed. If you got more than your share, it spoiled.

We sometimes talk about people being spoiled too. I think it happens when someone gets more than their fair share and when someone begins to think that their want is their need, and when someone begins to expect that they have a right to all of their wants being met regardless of what it cost anyone else. I think we can all agree that it isn't desirable to be spoiled like that. It is much more desirable to understand what our needs are, to work to ensure that those needs are met and then to make sure that everyone else has what they need too.

Writer Margot Starbuck describes how she thinks all this works.

“God’s love for you and God’s love for the larger world in need cannot be separated. God’s longing to see you liberated for life that really is life can’t be neatly pulled apart from God’s longing to see the poor liberated for life that really is life. My friend Nate, who works with Compassion International, sees this pretty clearly. Nate will be the first one to tell you, “Compassion’s work, releasing children from poverty in Jesus’ name, is releasing me from wealth in Jesus’ name.” If your life is anything like mine, God longs to set you free from addiction to pleasure, appearances, busyness, consumption, envy, greed and self-absorption.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Margot’s point leads to a third lesson that we glean from the Exodus story. God provides an overabundance of manna on the sixth day so that the people can observe Sabbath on the seventh day. God’s gift to the people is a new way of being in the world that enables them to remember that God’s ways are different from the world’s ways. Life isn’t about accumulating for self alone but rather about living faithfully in community with God at the center.

Writer and activist Shane Claiborne writes that “God’s dream for creation is different from Pharaoh’s dream or Rome’s dream or Wall Street’s dream... God’s people are not to accumulate stuff for the sake of security, but to share indiscriminately with the scandalous and holy confidence that God will provide for tomorrow. We need not stockpile stuff in barns or 401ks, especially when there is someone in need.”^{iv}

The promise of God’s daily provision is echoed in the petition from the Lord’s Prayer, “Give us this day our daily bread.” This communal prayer is not selfish but focuses on the needs of all for today. There is enough for everyone. Gandhi said it so well: “There is enough for everyone’s need, but there is not enough for everyone’s greed.”

The Book of Acts records the early church sharing their resources so that everyone had what they needed. We are also invited to share freely for the common good. That means letting go of our own wants in order to provide for the needs of someone else. Our text from Philippians tells the story of the Philippian church sharing with the Apostle Paul so that he could continue his work as a missionary. Paul expressed his gratitude to them for their gift, adding that he didn’t consider himself in need...not in a way that would cause him to ask them for anything. Paul had found a place of peace – free from need - by exercising a deep faith and trust in God. Paul told the Philippians that he had learned the secret of being content. It is trusting in this simple truth – a verse that is one of the most commonly quoted and misunderstood scriptures today – “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” Paul’s secret is a deep faith in the one who is his source of strength and who will never let him go. Paul’s secret that enables him to persevere through the easy times and the difficult times is to stay close to the one who has made him and has set his course in life. In doing so Paul could never fail. The same is true for you and me.

I quoted Adam Hamilton’s Contentment Prayer when we began. Adding to Paul’s great secret, Hamilton writes about four keys to being content:

- 1) “Remember – it could be worse.” We can always find a situation that is worse than our own. I have practiced this from time to time and I am surprised by how effective it can be. When receiving a bill that was larger than expected I said, “Well – at least it isn’t \$1000 more!” After having a car accident someone might say, “I’m so glad no one was hurt!” There is someone I visit regularly who has had a terrible ongoing problem with their physical health. I am always amazed that they can say, without fail, “Robert, It could be so much worse!” It keeps him going. One caution – I don’t think it is a good idea to offer this up on behalf of another person. It is ok to say this about our own situation but it isn’t helpful after someone has shared how tough things have been for you to say in response, “Well – it could be a lot worse!” Just give them a hug and be there for them!
- 2) Ask yourself, “How long will this make me happy?” This applies to the wants in our life. If you are at the store and thinking about buying a new shirt or a couch or a refrigerator or a car, ask yourself this question. “How long is this really going to make me happy?” Make yourself wrestle with that question before making a purchase of this kind.
- 3) “Develop a grateful heart.” Take time regularly to thank God for the blessings of life. Rather than focusing on what you do not have, spend time focusing on what you do have and say thank you! Some people even make lists or keep a Gratitude Journal to develop the habit of keeping our eyes open to the blessing of God.
- 4) Ask yourself, “Where does my soul find true satisfaction?” Sabbath rest is meant to offer us the opportunity to reconnect with God, to remember who we are as God’s children, and to remember that we can trust God

to satisfy the desires of our heart. Our restless hearts will not be satisfied by more food or a new outfit or a new car. They will only be satisfied by the one who created us, redeemed us, and sustains our lives with all that we need. When we strive for more than God's best for us we slowly lose focus and wander from the path that God intends for us to walk.

In the book of Proverbs there is a bit of wisdom literature that offers the following petition to God... "Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that I need, or I shall be full, and deny you, and say, "Who is the Lord?" or I shall be poor, and steal, and profane the name of my God." (Proverbs 30:8,9) In other words – Lord, don't give me too much and don't give me too little. Give me just enough and help me to trust in you!

So my friends, when we have enough, may we recognize it and simply say, "Enough is enough!" And may we all give thanks for the enough that God has given to us. And when our cup overflows, may we choose to share rather than get a bigger cup.

To God be the Glory! Amen.

ⁱ Terrence Fretheim, Interpretation: Exodus. (WJK, Louisville, 1990)p. 183

ⁱⁱ Millard Fuller, Theology of Enough,

ⁱⁱⁱ Margot Starbuck, <http://www.margotstarbuck.com/>

^{iv} Shane Claiborne, Irresistible Revolution