

18th Sunday after Pentecost (Year A)

Exodus 16:1-18

The whole congregation of the Israelites set out from Elim; and Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. 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. This is what the Lord has commanded: "Gather as much of it as each of you needs, an omer to a person according to the number of persons, all providing for those in their own tents." ' The Israelites did so, some gathering more, some less. But when they measured it with an omer, those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed.

Luke 22:1-23

Now the festival of Unleavened Bread, which is called the Passover, was near. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to put Jesus to death, for they were afraid of the people.

Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was one of the twelve; he went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers of the temple police about how he might betray him to them. They were

greatly pleased and agreed to give him money. So he consented and began to look for an opportunity to betray him to them when no crowd was present.

Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, 'Go and prepare the Passover meal for us that we may eat it.' They asked him, 'Where do you want us to make preparations for it?' 'Listen,' he said to them, 'when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him into the house he enters and say to the owner of the house, "The teacher asks you, 'Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' " He will show you a large room upstairs, already furnished. Make preparations for us there.' So they went and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. He said to them, 'I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.' Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, 'Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.' Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table. For the Son of Man is going as it has been determined, but woe to that one by whom he is betrayed!' Then they began to ask one another which one of them it could be who would do this.

Remembering can be a tricky and sometimes painful exercise these days. Remember the days when we could hug one another and shake hands? Remember the days when we could sing hymns together in a room to the organ instead of humming or gently singing alone in our homes while watching worship on a screen? Remember the days when a presidential debate was, well, *actually* a debate? Remember when we could celebrate together physically at the birth of a child or mourn together physically at the death of a beloved friend or family member?

Remembering can be a painful exercise in times of despair and disorientation. But remembering can also be the single most important thing to do in exactly these times. Can you remember a time when you were taught something about generosity? Can you remember a time when you were taught something about resilience? Can you remember a time when you were taught something about compassion, forgiveness, curiosity, or joy? As a faith community, one of the most important things we do is to remind one another of the times when God has provided. And that is more crucial now than ever because times of destruction, despair, and desolation have a tendency to give us tunnel vision where we are hyper focused on the present to the extent that it closes us off from our past and diminishes our capacity to envision a better future.

That's what I'm worried about these days. I'm worried that we're so overwhelmed by the Goliath amount of drama in the present that we will forget the lessons of our past to the detriment of a healthier future. I mean, think about what all has happened in our nation in just the last seven days since you and I gathered to worship! And yet, amid the chaos and confusion, we must pause to look at where we've been. And only then can we faithfully step into the future to which God calls us.

That's what we're going to be doing this month during the four Sundays of our stewardship season. We'll look back to remember what God has done for us and then we'll look forward to where God is calling us. In between those two places in time, we will read the texts before us in our messy present. Yes, we will focus on our Money Story even as we navigate the next four weeks, four weeks that are sure to be some of the toughest weeks our country has gone through in our lifetime. But our job for *today* is to remember. And we have two texts before us that we'll journey through on our way to the Lord's Table.

The first story is both political and economic. In today's text from the book of Exodus, the Israelites have escaped Pharaoh's dominion and are being trained in the wilderness for a new kind of living. You see, Pharaoh's economy was a never-ending rat race to produce, produce, produce; an endless and relentless pursuit of profit procured by the forced labor of the Israelites. Those at the top amassed absurd amounts of wealth at the expense of those on the bottom. That was the Egyptian economy.

But in the wilderness, God introduces the Israelites to a vastly different economy. You see, in God's economy, the rat race is over. The Israelites have been given a mysterious form of food in the wilderness known as manna - which is nothing more than the Hebrew phrase for the question "what is it?" because the Israelites were quite confused when it first appeared. Manna was a fine, sweet, flaky substance that the Israelites gathered and baked into cakes.

I call this substance a mysterious substance because it had a rather peculiar quality to it. It was impossible to store more than what you needed for one day. You see, when the manna first fell from heaven, some of the Israelites tried to hoard it and gather more than what they alone needed. And it makes sense that they would do that. After all, that was the economic model that Pharaoh taught them. Secondly, hoarding resources is an understanding thought process for someone who has been denied resources all their life. But God is teaching them a different kind of living. They are no longer in Pharaoh's jurisdiction; they're in God's. And so, whenever someone gathered more than their daily allotted amount of manna, they would wake up the next morning and find the excess amount rotten and useless. Each day, the Israelites were instructed to gather only what was needed for that day, with the only exception being the day before the Sabbath when they could gather enough for two days so they didn't have to gather on the day of rest. Simply put, manna taught the Israelites to trust in God and to stop the rat race. Manna taught the Israelites to stop looking for more and more and more and simply trust in God to provide *enough*.

And a reason it's so important for us to remember this story is that our nation has taught us to be obsessed with more. Jesus taught me to pray "give us this day our daily bread." But this nation has taught me to pray "give me this day all the bread I'll ever need plus my neighbor's bread, too." If you need evidence of this we need look no further than our country's obsession with military spending. According to the Peter G. Peterson Foundation, a non-partisan research organization, the United States spent \$732 billion dollars on our military last year. That's more than China, India, Russia, Saudi Arabia, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Japan, South Korea, and Brazil spent *combined*.¹

\$732 billion dollars of military spending while children in rural Kentucky don't know where their next meal is coming from because their parents are unemployed or underemployed.

\$732 billion dollars of military spending while the opioid addiction pandemic destroys communities in our state.

¹ https://www.pgpf.org/chart-archive/0053_defense-comparison

\$732 billion dollars of military spending while our Kentucky schools are grossly underfunded and our teachers underpaid.

\$732 billion dollars of *our tax dollars* spent on the military while 12% of Kentucky adults and their families can't afford health insurance.²

Our obsession with more in this nation is literally killing us. Walter Brueggemann states the following: *"We who are now the richest nation are today's main coveters. We never feel that we have enough; we have to have more and more, and this insatiable desire destroys us. Whether we are liberal or conservative Christians, we must confess that the central problem of our lives is that we are torn apart by the conflict between our attraction to the good news of God's abundance and the power of our belief in scarcity—a belief that makes us greedy, mean and unneighborly."*³

But the good news is that God provides us with an alternative way of living. A daily manna style of living. And, in many ways, we live in this alternate economy right here at Beaumont Presbyterian Church. No matter the amount that you give to support the mission and ministries of this congregation, you are welcomed to the same Table to receive the same grace. If you give more money to this church than others, the quality of your juice and bread at the Lord's table will not be better than anyone else's. No matter the amount of money you give, you will receive the same pastoral care from me and the session. You'll be invited to the same events. You'll be welcomed to the same dinners and worship services. This congregation does not work on a tiered system where the amount of money you give determines the quality of your "experience" here. It's just not how the church should operate.

We remember this story because it challenges us to look critically at ourselves and the ways that our society has formed us as citizens within it. We remember this story because it reminds us that God's economic model is vastly different than the one you and I have been raised under. And that gives us a healthy dosage of humility.

And humility also comes to mind when we look at today's second passage - a familiar one to many of us. Judas has already made up his mind to betray his friend, Jesus, for a sum of money. His Money Story, we might say, is tarnished by shame and greed. And yet, Jesus still welcomes him to the Table.

On the cover of your bulletin today, you'll see a painting from a Sanctified Art by Lisle Gwynn Garrity. She says the following about her depiction of Jesus offering Judas the same bread and cup he offered to the other eleven disciples: *"In the face of so much uncertainty and fear for the future, how might you behave? Judas wants the nightmare to end. He wants security, assurance, quick relief. He wants to go back to how things used to be. And so, evil enters into Judas' story like ink spilled across the page. But Jesus doesn't let Judas' story end here. Instead, he welcomes him to the table—a table where fear and doubt and difference have a place too. He offers him a meal where brokenness just makes more to pass around. He pours into a common cup that promises a new way forward. Scarcity and fear and conflict will always threaten to dismember our story. But can we remember that God has a greater story to tell—a story that re-members us and makes us whole?"*

² https://www.healthy-ky.org/res/images/resources/KHIP-insurance-FINAL_1.pdf

³ <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2012-01/liturgy-abundance-myth-scarcity>

Friends, Jesus offers Judas a new way forward by offering him the cup and the bread. And Jesus offers each of us - *all* of us - a new way forward when we are welcomed to this Table. Let us, for a minute, dwell on the fact that Jesus welcomed Judas. Judas traded Jesus' life for a lump of cash. It may sound extreme to you but many people in this country - those who hunger, those who can't afford health care, those whose civil rights continue to be ignored - know all too well the feeling of their lives being traded for financial profit.

And yet, Jesus still welcomes Judas to the Table. When Jesus could have shunned his enemy and kicked him out, he did the opposite. He showed love to his enemy.

I, like all of you, woke up to the news on Friday morning that Donald Trump had been diagnosed with COVID-19. I wish I could tell you that my first reaction was sympathy, but it wasn't. After I read the news I started working again on this sermon that I'm preaching to you now. As I read again the story of Jesus welcoming Judas to the Table, I felt a pang of guilt because I claim to be a follower of Jesus and sometimes I get that right and many, many times I get that wrong. I'm a work in progress and the Holy Spirit has her work cut out for a sinner like me.

Later that night, Tricia, Hazel Grace, Elsie, and I, laid on our bed to say our prayers before putting Hazel Grace to sleep. We prayed for the President. We prayed for him as we watched Marine One take off from the South Lawn of the White House to go to the hospital. We prayed for his health and for the health of all those within his administration that were also infected with coronavirus. We prayed for the President, difficult though it was, because I don't want my daughter to learn that we only pray for people we like. We prayed for the President because I want my daughter to remember this story about Jesus welcoming Judas to his Table.

So, on the very, very slight chance that the President of the United States is watching this worship service right now from his hospital room at Walter Reed, I sincerely hope he joins us for communion. Because if Judas' sins didn't exclude him from the Table, and if my sins don't exclude me, and if yours don't exclude you, then neither do the President's. And, for some of us, that's a really tough pill to swallow.

But that's the upside down economy of God's grace. These are the stories that we're called to remember as we begin this journey to talk about our Money Story. So together, let us remember these stories and be transformed by them.

I'll end this sermon with the words of the late Rachel Held Evans in her book "Searching for Sunday": *"The elements and the meal are identified in different ways: the body of Christ, broken; the blood of Christ, shed; the Bread of heaven, the cup of salvation, the mystery of faith, the supper of the Lamb. But in every tradition I know, someone, at some point, says, 'Remember.' Remember how God became one of us? Remember how God ate with us and drank with us, laughed with us and cried with us? Remember how God suffered for us, and died for us, and gave his life for the life of the world? Remember? Remember?"*