

“The Rain Falls the Same on Everyone” New London UMC Sept. 20, 2020
Exodus 16:1-16, 31; Matthew 20:1-16 *The Message* **Rev. Joyce Rich**

You might have wondered why the title of today’s sermon refers to rain – when there is no reference to meteorological rainfall in our two scripture readings. But God does “rain” bread down from the skies on the Israelites in the Exodus reading. And that “rain” is evidence of the equity of God’s generosity and God’s justice, which are also referred to in Jesus’ story about God’s kingdom in the Gospel of Matthew. You might have also noticed that these displays of God’s generosity and God’s justice do not always match up with what we might think would be “fair” or “right” in similar situations. For example, would WE pay everyone the same wage no matter how many hours they work?! Or would WE provide food to everyone no matter how much, or how little, they complain?! Hmmm. Sometimes God’s generosity and God’s justice doesn’t quite sit right with us and can leave us feeling disturbed or troubled. And I find that I am reminded of another verse from the Gospel of Matthew, back in chapter five, that says:

*. . . for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good,
and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. (Matthew 5:45b RSV)*

Evil or good, just or unjust, everybody sees the sun rise in the morning. And the rain falls on everyone – whether they are: unjust or just; good or evil. The rain is going to fall. The sun is going to rise. That’s how God does things. Because God is generous, and God is just, the sun is going to rise, and the rain is going to fall on everyone, without exception.

That’s what the Israelites learned on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had left Egypt. . . . So they were counting the days – who wouldn’t? And they were noticing how their food supplies were becoming depleted – who wouldn’t? And they remembered how much food there had been in Egypt. But they also seemed to be starting to forget that they couldn’t eat any of that lovely lamb stew and bread unless they worked long and hard every day. . . . Remember, it had only been 45 days since they had left Egypt, but they were already starting to block out the memory of how back-breakingly miserable their lives had been. It was like: “Forget the slavery! Remember the food! Why can’t we have food like we used to?! Did God bring us out here to the wilderness to starve us to death?!” . . . It used to be that they would complain about their heavy toil. Now they were complaining about not getting what they wanted to eat. Clearly the Israelites had not forgotten how to complain in the last month and a half! . . . And God had not forgotten how to listen. Moses and Aaron told them, “God has heard you. And this is what the God who brought you out of Egypt is going to do: God will provide meat tonight and your fill of bread in the morning; and you will see the Glory of God.”

And then EVERYONE – the WHOLE company of Israel turned to face the wilderness and saw the Glory of God visible in the Cloud that was always with them. The same

Cloud that provided shade for all of them during the heat of each day, and light at night. They ALL witnessed the Glory of God visible in the Cloud. . . . And that evening they all saw the quail that flew in and covered the ground of their entire campsite. And everyone had quail meat to eat that night. . . . The following morning everyone collected this frost-like white stuff from the ground that looked like coriander seed and tasted like a honey enriched cracker. No matter how much (or how little) of this stuff they collected, each and every one of them had enough to eat for that day. And those who tried to hold back, or hoard, some of it for the next day (clearly not fully trusting or believing that God would again provide enough for them tomorrow), learned that it was a mistake to try to store manna. The only exception being on the sixth day when everyone collected enough for two days so they would have enough to eat when they rested on the Sabbath. And if anyone thought they could gain an advantage by going out to look for more manna to gather up on the Sabbath – they wouldn't find any on what was to be their day of rest. There was no point to looking for 'more' when they already had 'enough.' When God had already provided 'enough' to everyone. And week after week, no matter how much or how little any individual person or household had gathered on the sixth day – they found they still had enough to eat on the seventh day of Sabbath. God had generously provided enough for each and every one of them.

But we can imagine how irritating that might have been for people who were very diligent about gathering manna. No matter how long and hard they worked at gathering manna they still ended up with no more manna than someone who barely put in any time or effort to gather it! Now does that seem fair to you?! . . . To which God could reply, "How is that unfair? Didn't I say I would provide enough for each person? Can't I do with my manna what I want to do with it? Take what you have been given and eat it."

God is going to care about, and care for, ALL of God's people as God sees fit. God will be generous. And God will be just. We may not fully realize what a blessing that is until we see ourselves as the workers who couldn't find any work all day and have begun to wonder if we would survive another day. And then in the midst of our desperation, at the very end of the day, we given work AND a full day's wage. . . . Or maybe we won't appreciate God's generosity and God's justice until we know what it is like to be in pain each time we bend over to gather the manna that is right there on the ground – if only we could reach it. Perhaps someone will be kind enough to help us. Or perhaps we will miraculously find that what we could gather is enough for today. . . . But we really don't like to see ourselves as being among those who are 'in need' of God's generosity, do we? We'd rather see ourselves as those who can get up and get to work at dawn's early light, or who can manage just fine with gathering plenty of manna each day. And yet, how will we receive God's good and generous gifts if we can't see ourselves as being in need of them? Hmmm. We might need to think on that. Amen.