

Pentecost 19, Proper 20A
September 21, 2008

RCL
Exodus 16:2-15
Psalm 105:1-6,37-45
Philippians 1:21-30
Matthew 20:1-16

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God will provide. It's because we believe this that we're here this morning, part of this Christian community, worshiping here together at All Saints, Parma. We are baptized into Christ's Body and we have faith – faith in things we cannot see or hear or touch.

Our faith tells us that God cares for us and always will, and we believe that God will provide. Don't we?

Despite the uncertainty of the future our trust in God's care sustains us. Doesn't it?

We read these ancient Old Testament stories and think that they are so different from our lives today, but really, how different are they?

The whole congregation of the Israelites have made it across the Red Sea waters, led by Moses and delivered by God out of captivity by the Egyptians, but now they find themselves in strange territory without the comforts of home.

And they grumble to Moses – “We should have just stayed to die in Egypt. At least we had shelter and meat and bread to eat. Now we're going to die of hunger in the wilderness.”

We wish we could go back. Better the devil that you know. At least we knew what to expect when we were back there making bricks for the Pharaoh. Now our future is completely unknown. And the unknown future is what we fear the most.

But God was present with them. God is always present, though nowadays we don't have the benefit of seeing the pillar of fire or the pillar of cloud in which God leads his people by night and by day. We feel God's presence sometimes but the truth is, he is always with us, wanting to lead us to a better life, to a place closer to himself.

“Tell them,” God said to Moses and Aaron, when he heard the Israelites complaining, “tell them I will give them meat and bread to eat, right here in the wilderness.”

And he did. At evening God sent quails, enough to cover the ground, for the people to eat. And in the morning – manna, God's bread. Bread that lasts only a day, just enough of it to sustain the people for one day.

They could not collect it and store it up. There was no security in manna. It fed them and it also served to show that they could trust God to provide, day after day. Trust, in God's view, is better security than storing up.

Last year I visited my friend Anne when her husband was dying. She had been caring for him at home for a long time already and had experienced the deep sorrow of watching his mental and physical capacity, once so vibrant, gradually but surely decline. Now Ted was in a hospice facility and Anne was keeping constant vigil.

I asked what was sustaining her as she sat beside his bed. And she said “manna. Every day God sends me something that gives me nourishment,” she said. “Like manna. I don’t know what it’s going to be or when, but every day it comes – a letter from a friend, a hug, a smile, some good news about my children, a happy memory – God sends me something every day that carries me through to the next day. It’s manna.”

I praised her for being able to see these difficult days in that way. “No,” she said, “it’s not me. It took a friend to point that out to me and that insight was like manna, too. God will provide.”

God does provide, but not usually the way we plan that he should. Witness Jesus’ parable in the gospel today, the one about the workers in the vineyard. Some of those workers have been toiling in the vineyard all day, since sunrise, and some for only about half an hour. But all are paid the same wage.

Is this a sample of God’s justice? Is it fair that I have to work harder and longer than the next guy in this life? How can I put my trust in a God who isn’t fair? Not fair by our standard of justice.

But the fairness of the God of Israel, of the God we worship, is this – all people have the opportunity to know God, all people may come closer to God, all people are protected by their Creator’s abiding love.

All people are offered manna to sustain them. It’s up to us to recognize it for what it is.

God receives each of us into the abundance of his love when we’re ready – whether it’s at the beginning of the day, early in our lives, from Sunday School on, or whether it’s at the 11th hour and we realize late in life what it means to trust in God.

God receives us when we’re ready to trust – in the morning or the evening of life – and the reward is the same for everyone no matter how long we labored to come to it.

And that, actually, is supreme fairness. That is God’s justice. ‘And it is full of his abundant love to all of us.

God will provide. There is manna every day. Trust in it. Trust God.
Thanks be to God.

Soli Deo Gloria