

Plenty

Rev. John Allen

When I was a kid I remember singing this song at church called “Table of Plenty.” It was a communion hymn. The refrain went:

Come to the feast of heaven and earth

Come to the table of plenty

God will provide for all that we need

here at the table of plenty.

Now when I was a kid I found those words kind of confusing. Because the only time I had ever heard the word “plenty” used was at the dessert table, looking up at my mother with a plate overflowing with cookies and cake, the frosting from the first slice still all over my face, and her saying sternly “John, that’s plenty.”

That was my table of plenty.

But back to the Israelites. They have escaped from slavery in Egypt. A place where they were worked nearly to death, where they were forced to make bricks without straw, a place where a maniacal king grew ever more brutal by the day until the day when he ordered all the first-born children of the Israelites killed, thrown into the Nile River.

And then God delivered them out of that state, sending plagues and darkness, parting a sea so that they could walk through on dry land.

Miracle after miracle after miracle.

That part of the story wraps up at the end of chapter 15. Turn the page. Chapter 16, it's been a few days in the wilderness. God has miraculously provided them water to drink, but there is no food.

And someone says: "We should have stayed in Egypt." "We should have stayed!" "At least there we had plenty to eat."

It is amazing how quickly we can lose perspective isn't it. Never-mind all the horrors of slavery that had been left behind. Never-mind that Egypt was the place where they had been worked nearly to death all while seeing their children thrown into the river.

At least the food had been good.

And so they go do complain to Moses. "Did you bring us out here just so that we could die?"

Of course, I don't to be too hard on them. People do need to eat after all. And no God did not bring them out there to die. Have a little faith.

And so God says to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and you will go out and gather it up, but just enough for one day. Don't worry. More will come each day. There will be plenty."

So the next morning everyone woke up, calmly gathered just what they needed for the day, and went about...

Nah, just kidding. What do you think happened? The text says: “But they did not listen, some gathered more than they needed and kept it until morning, but it became foul, and Moses was angry with them.”

Just like me at the dessert table, when they saw that abundance they could not stop themselves. They had to get as much as possible.

It sounds like some of the Israelites tried to get into the *manna* business. After all, with such an abundant resource showing up time and time again, we would expect an enterprising spirit to emerge. The notion that everyone would gather as much as they could is actually not that surprising.

The surprise comes when God upends the scheme with this miraculous substance that cannot be stored and cannot be gathered in quantities beyond any individual’s need.

Which begs the obvious question. Why? Why did God want to make it so difficult on them? Why not just make corn grow, its great sustenance, it can be stored easily. Or wheat, they could have made bread.

Well, throughout the book of Exodus we see, again and again, that God uses the wilderness as a training ground for the Israelites. It is a place where freed slaves are learning how to be God's chosen people.

And today's lesson is this: trust God to provide enough, expect an abundance, and take only what you need, and don't hoard anything.

In other words. There is a plenty. And it is plenty.

That confusing word. That means two things. An overwhelming abundance, more than we could ask or ever need. Plenty.

And. Enough. Plenty.

I am sure that many of us live with scarcity of one kind or another. There may never seem to be enough, there may be dreams that feel unfulfilled, pressures of unpaid bills, a fear that we are just barely hanging on to the life we have.

But most of us. Most of us, I dare say. Have plenty. Maybe not the overwhelming abundance of our wildest dreams. Maybe not even enough to live without worry. Maybe not even enough to live the life we expected or planned.

But most of us, I dare say, have enough. Enough to live. Enough for some comforts. Enough to enjoy.

So what do we do when we come across a little extra. A little more than we really need?

Look, everyone of us, myself included, gets something we don't really need from time to time. I am not asking you to beat yourself up about it.

But, I always feel stretched, not to be perfect, but to better, when I see just what it is that God desires for us and for our world.

And I think God desires a world where everyone has plenty.

Which means that some of us, who might want to gather more, might have to gather a little less. Anyway, a lot of it is just going to spoil in our storehouses anyway.

Following worship today in coffee hour we will all have a chance to visit with representatives from several organizations that our church supports through your giving to the Benevolence Fund so that together we can witness the good work that our giving makes possible.

During our offering today, we will collect money for the United Church of Christ's Disaster Response Ministry, which will be coordinating long term recovery efforts after this Summer's hurricanes.

Our giving to these organizations is an key part of the mission of the church. It is one way that we do our small part to bring God's love to life in the world beyond these walls.

The money in our bank accounts may not have descended from heaven and settled on the ground like the morning dew. But nevertheless, all we have comes from God. All of it.

Gather what you need, and gather abundantly and joyfully, for God's bounty is plentiful.

But when that moment comes when you realize that you have plenty.

Let's leave the rest for someone else.