

Enough Really IS Enough

(Matthew 20:1-16)

Sermon delivered by The Rev. Matt Rhodes at Christ Church, Millwood, Virginia
The Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost, September 24, 2017

In the name of one God – creator, redeemer and sustainer. Amen.

As I sat down this week to begin preparing this sermon, one rooted in a Gospel parable with an agricultural setting, I realized that writing it at a desk wouldn't do. To try and do this one justice, I felt like the only place to complete it would be *in* an agricultural setting. So I packed up my laptop, a commentary, a few bottles of water and my earphones and headed out.

Now country preachers, with rare exception, have the wonderful luxury of always being able to write their sermons in a country setting. For me, it became even more wonderful as I drove down back roads deeper into the valley and to a place that in recent weeks has become one of my favorite places to sit, admire the beauty of this area, and listen to nothing more than the sounds of birds and the breeze.

In this particular spot, I gazed at the mountains crouched on the horizon, with some trees beginning to show faint signs of transforming from summer green into the various colors of the autumn spectrum. I listened to the birds chattering from their perches in the trees or flying far overhead. And I looked at an adjoining farm, presumably at the point in the day where the early morning chores were completed and those who worked the land were taking a break before heading back out for their afternoon work. During this time, it was quiet – but it was very much alive.

Farms for me have always been a symbol of plenty – a feeling most likely grounded in my own time living on a dairy farm in the foothills of the Blue Ridge near Lynchburg. Being a dairy farm, for me the plenty was revealed in the abundance of fresh milk that we received every week from our friends who owned and worked the farm. Plenty was revealed in the fresh meat that showed up after a head or two from the herd was sent off to market.

And while I took it for granted at the time, plenty for me was being raised in a family that struggled from time to time but which always had just enough – no more and no less.

The concept of “plenty” is something that continued to come out at me as I read today's passage from Matthew. It reveals itself in many ways throughout this parable. There is certainly plenty of work to be done in the vineyard, as the owner went out to find laborers five times over the course of the day. There were plenty of workers available, as the owner had no problem finding individuals willing to head out into the vineyard. And there was plenty of money, as each person who went to work that day received a full day's wages.

But there is plenty in other areas. On one hand, there is plenty of gratitude by those who, even at 5:00, were hired to do some work. On the other, there is plenty of grumbling – complaining by those who had worked since the start of the day and still received the same wage as those hired five and eight and 10 hours later. That seems like bad financial practice; in fact, as Charlotte Dudley Cleghorn writes in a commentary on this passage, “This parable reminds us that God is a lousy bookkeeper.”

God may be a lousy bookkeeper, but remember this: the books are always balanced.

And the balanced books always reflect the plenty that God offers: plenty of grace; plenty of mercy; and plenty of forgiveness. The person who sins daily will receive just as much forgiveness as the one who sins once in their entire life. The person who denies God for almost their entire life will receive the same loving embrace when they finally come around to opening the door to God as the one who joyfully threw open that door from day one. Whether we feel like we deserve it or not, whether we feel like we are entitled to it or not, we are going to receive from God.

We're going to receive in abundance. We're going to get plenty. Like the landowner of the parable, God doesn't have to do this. But God chooses to. And we are the beneficiaries of that choice.

I heard a comment at a meeting a few days ago of representatives from the churches who participate in the Soul-FULL meals that is a beautiful analogy for plenty. No matter what time someone shows up for the meal – right at 5:15 or as the doors are closing at 6:30 – there will always be a seat at the table and plenty to go around.

During my first several months with you, I've watched with joy at all you accomplish. And when holding it up for a closer look under the lens of this Gospel passage, one thing is abundantly clear. There is plenty. No matter how many people come into the food pantry on the first weekend of the month seeking to fill their cupboards, there is more than enough to go around. No matter how daunting a task may seem and how difficult it may be to see it getting done, there are always plenty of people showing up to help. No matter how much we continue to love one another and support one another, through joy and sorrow – loving one and supporting one another so deeply, in fact, that it doesn't seem like we can give any more – there is much more love and support in reserve.

And there is plenty of welcome in this place. It doesn't matter whether someone is the first one in the door in the morning or a long-time parishioner, or whether they are a visitor this place, tentatively walking through the door for the very first time. There is plenty of welcome to go around.

As the landowner tells the workers, "I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?"

These are the words of a God who loves us, who makes a choice and chooses to give abundantly to all. Whether we are the first ones in the field or the last ones called, we have been promised our share.

There are, of course, many whose journeys may not necessarily allow them to see that there is plenty. They may not feel that there is enough love or compassion, nor is there for them an abundance of things that will fill the holes in their hearts or their lives. But that is where we as fellow children of God can do some of our best work.

We can be the glimpse of the abundance that is there for them. We can offer the love that they may not be feeling, or the care for a hurting heart or spirit. We can offer the embrace that may be missing.

We can be the living embodiment of the landowner who offers the promise of plenty for them, as there is for everyone else.

For we have been promised enough. And they – **we** – shall have plenty.

Amen.