



Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene

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

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today, I want to start by putting on my civic hat. We are weeks away from the midterm elections and I strongly believe every person who is eligible should vote. So, consider this my public service announcement to remind everyone to double check that you are registered to vote.

It's easy to do, both Idaho and Washington State have websites where you can check if you are registered, and if not, to register to vote online. If you want to use mail-in ballots, the deadline for Idaho is Oct. 23rd and for Washington it's Oct. 26th. And, then of course, be sure to get out and vote on or before Nov. 3rd. Early voting is already open in Idaho. Thank you.

Let us now turn to today's scriptures.

My initial reaction as I started exploring today's lessons was that there is a whole lot of complaining going on. First the Israelites accuse Moses and Aaron of bringing them into the wilderness to starve them to death. Then the laborers complain because others got paid the same as them, doing a fraction of the work.

The results of those complaints are the same: God hears and then provides. And more than that, He provides generously and abundantly. The nuances to each of these stories offer different visions of God's incredible grace.

Over the past month we have been reading the stories of Moses and the exodus of the Israelites from captivity in Egypt. Already in that short, or rather what probably felt like a really long month, the Israelites have been confronted with challenge after challenge, and God has been a stalwart presence all the way. The mass exodus is now over, and the trauma of the Egyptian armies chasing them has passed, with God parting the Red Sea for them to cross to safety. The issue of water being bitter and not drinkable is also solved by God.

Today's scripture takes place in the second month after the Israelites left Egypt. I am sure there was a lot of unrest and concern over what was going to happen next. They are short on food, they are tired and they are hungry.

They complained against Moses and Aaron, accusing them of bringing them to the wilderness to die. They reminisce about having their fill of food, forgetting just how awful and abusive their exile in Egypt really was.

God comes to Moses and says he hears their complaints and will provide meat in the evenings and rain bread down from heaven in the mornings. Moses and Aaron tell the Israelites that their complaints were not against them, but against the Lord. Draw near to the Lord, they say, for God has heard your complaining.

As Aaron tells them what is going to happen, the Lord appears to the congregation of Israelites in a cloud. The Lord tells Aaron to say to the Israelites, “at twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning, you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.”

And that night and every night until they reached the promised land forty years later, quail filled the camp providing meat, and every morning, a fine flakey substance, the bread of heaven rained down upon the congregation, who were able to gather their fill. God also reminds the congregation about the sabbath covenant, providing enough for them to gather two days’ worth of food on the sixth day of each week.

These stories in Exodus offer great hope to us in our lives today, providing the wonderful promise of God’s provision. We have to turn to God and allow ourselves to be led on this faith journey. We can take comfort in stressful times to let the rhythms of our spiritual life, such as daily prayer and weekly worship, help to bring order to the chaos.

Richard Rohr offered these thoughts on living this journey of faith especially through the deserts in our lives. “Can we trust, like the Israelites had to, to let God liberate us from captivity to freedom, not fully knowing just how we will cross that desert. When we least expect it, there is an oasis. As the Scriptures promise, God will make the desert bloom (Isaiah 35:1).”

Our gospel lesson continues this theme of God’s abundant provision and grace for those who follow him. This parable called the laborers in the vineyard has had numerous interpretations over the years. These range from the generosity of the landowner to the exploitation of workers by a “union-busting” vineyard owner, to this showcasing Jesus’ acceptance of Gentiles and those outside the Jewish faith.

Of all the commentators I explored, the interpretations that resonated most with me were based upon how the initial hearers of this parable might interpret it.

This parable was directed to Jesus’ close disciples. Jesus had just told the young rich man who asked what he must do to obtain eternal life, to sell his possessions, give his money to the poor and follow him. The young man left grieving for he had many possessions. Jesus then talks to his close disciples about how difficult it will be for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Peter asked Jesus since they had left everything and followed him what will they have? Jesus says that everyone who has left houses, brothers, or sisters, or father or mother or children or fields for my name’s sake will receive 100-fold and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.

Jesus then moves into the parable we hear today. His disciples would recognize that the vineyard is representative of the house of Israel, both the people and the land. This is because various prophets had described God as the vintner. Thus, the vineyard becomes an image of Israel, and the landowner represents God.

The first laborers make an agreement with the landowner, which can evoke an image of the covenantal faithfulness of God. Then throughout the day, more and more are invited to work in the vineyard, even to the last hour, with the promise of being paid what is right.

Here we see aspects of God's extravagant grace. As one commentator put it, "Like the 'generous' landowner, God searches for those in need of godly work and provides everyone with the grace of a living wage in the vineyard of the Lord."

This grace is for everyone, the first, the last, you and me, and all in between. At the end of the day, everyone receives the generosity and abundance of what God provides. He underscores this by confronting the complaining laborers, saying he is choosing to give the last the same as he gave them, the first that were hired. He asks, is he not allowed to do what he chooses with what belongs to him? Or are they envious because he is generous? Jesus ends with the same statement he told his disciples earlier: The last will be first and the first will be last. This beautifully illustrates the sheer abundance of God's desire to care for every single one of us fully and equally.

Give thanks to the Lord and call upon his Name; make known his deeds among the peoples. Sing to him, sing praises to him.

So, instead of complaining about what we don't have, or being envious of what others receive, we can embrace these words of our Psalm today. We can focus on living in gratitude for all the marvelous works God enacts in our lives. Amen.

Resources:

- Richard Rohr meditation, Feb. 22, 2026
- Callie Plunket Brewton, Rector, Trinity Episcopal Church, Florence, AL
- Nicholas J. Schaser, Asst. Professor of Religious Studies, Macalester College
- John T. Carroll, Professor of New Testament, Union Presbyterian Seminary
- Emerson Powery, Dean for the school of Arts, Culture & Society, Messiah University.