

Riverside United Church
October 20, 2024

Scripture Lesson:
Exodus 16:1-18

Bread from Heaven

The whole congregation of the Israelites set out from Elim; and Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, 'If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.'

Then the Lord said to Moses, 'I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not. On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days.' So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, 'In the evening you shall know that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your complaining against the Lord. For what are we, that you complain against us?' And Moses said, 'When the Lord gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the Lord has heard the complaining that you utter against him—what are we? Your complaining is not against us but against the Lord.'

Then Moses said to Aaron, 'Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, "Draw near to the Lord, for he has heard your complaining." ' And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked towards the wilderness, and the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud. The Lord spoke to Moses and said, 'I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, "At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God." ' '

In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, 'What is it?' For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, 'It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat. This is what the Lord has commanded: "Gather as much of it as each of you needs, an omer to a person according to the number of persons, all providing for those in their own

tents.” ’ The Israelites did so, some gathering more, some less. But when they measured it with an omer, those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed.

Luke 22: 1-6, 14-23

The Plot to Kill Jesus

Now the festival of Unleavened Bread, which is called the Passover, was near. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to put Jesus to death, for they were afraid of the people.

Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was one of the twelve; he went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers of the temple police about how he might betray him to them. They were greatly pleased and agreed to give him money. So he consented and began to look for an opportunity to betray him to them when no crowd was present.

The Institution of the Lord’s Supper

When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. He said to them, ‘I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.’ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, ‘Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.’ Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table. For the Son of Man is going as it has been determined, but woe to that one by whom he is betrayed!’ Then they began to ask one another which one of them it could be who would do this.

Prayer of Illumination:

God of Life, may the words of my mouth,
and the meditations of all our minds and hearts,
lead us to deeper understanding of you,
and the love you call us to live. Amen.

“Our Money Story: Remember”

I wonder what prompted Judas to accept the thirty coins of silver. I wonder what prompted him to seek or to receive the transaction with the officials that led to betrayal of Jesus. I wonder what was Judas' back story - was he unhappy as a disciple? Was he questioning the leadership of Jesus? Was he needing the money? Was greed a stronger motivation than service? I wonder what was Judas' money story.

We are beginning a series of reflections entitled: "Our Money Story." What comes to mind when you hear that title?

One thing that may come to mind is that sort of an unwritten rule that has been operational in many churches - particularly what have been called the mainline churches - is that we shouldn't talk about money in church. I am not really sure of all the reasons for that rule, but maybe it has its roots in the reality that we are uncomfortable talking about money.

I remember when I first went to serve in ministry in rural Saskatchewan, I asked one farmer "how much land do you own?" He quickly warned me that that was not an appropriate question to ask. He said it would be like asking someone, "How much money do you have in the bank?" I learned over time that land ownership was not as sensitive a question with most others - after all it was public knowledge, who owned what land. But, it was not and is not public knowledge how much each one has in the bank, and even as a rookie minister I knew that I should not ask that question then or now.

Maybe we are uncomfortable talking about money in church because we recognize that in our culture money and wealth is really the god that is worshipped.

Maybe we are uncomfortable talking about money in church because we have created this separation of the spiritual and the material.

Maybe we are uncomfortable talking about money in church because we know that Jesus talked more about money and economic relationships than he did about any other subject and what he said doesn't sit all that well with the money story that our society has taught us.

Five or six years ago, I co-led a course for the Ottawa School of Theology and Spirituality and the title of the course was "Would You want Jesus as Your Financial Advisor?" - and the consensus at the end of the course was an answer of "No!". But, it was a helpful forum to reflect on the values and principles that Jesus was raising and how they translate into our reality.

So, we get to do some more of that reflecting over the 4 weeks of this series - "Our Money Story." For those who have been around the church for awhile, this is a

Stewardship series. What comes to mind when you hear the phrase - "Our Money Story." Who is the "Our"? It could be our society-the society's money story; it could be the church, it could be this congregation's money story, it could be the family you are part of or have grown up in.

We can also say, "My Money Story" and I hope there is some reflection at that level as well. Because it gets at the story of the money, what are the different parts of that question.

The resources for this series are offered by "A Sanctified Art" and we have used their materials for Advent last year and for Lent this past spring. This is a four week series and we are going to have two weeks now, then take a break for two weeks for other special themes, Anniversary Sunday and Remembrance Day, and then return to it for the last two weeks of November. There are four themes for the four weeks: Remember, Release, Re-imagine, and Restore.

Today we are invited to remember and both of our scripture readings remind us of major stories that the people of God are invited to remember, to retell, to remember not as nostalgia, but to remember as foundational trust and assurance.

The story of the exodus is the story from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the wilderness towards the promised land. The money story of the Israelites traveling in the desert was that they were having difficulty adjusting from the predictability of slavery to the unpredictability of freedom. They were hungry and thirsty and weren't sure this freedom idea was such a great idea. And so there is the provision of manna from beyond - bread for each day. It is not to be stockpiled, but a sense of trust is to be nurtured. This truth was to be remembered and it is why Jesus taught his followers to give us each day our daily bread.

This story of the wilderness is remembered at the Passover celebration and it was the Passover that Jesus was sharing with his disciples that is the setting for the story of Judas. I wonder why Judas accepted the thirty coins of silver.

Maybe we can find ourselves in this story through the character of Judas. Maybe we can find ourselves in God's Money Story of Trust and Generosity through the character of Judas who was influenced by another money narrative that there isn't enough.

If we were to name the money story of our society, then we might recall phrases such as:

- everyone for themselves
- worth is determined by what we own.

- We might know that it is hard to find daily bread when Ontario Works, or ODSP, or pension income have not increased during this time of inflation.
- We might know that there is a lot of controversy when there is a proposed increase to minimum wages and yet there is acceptance of the reality of the top salaries in our society.
- We might remember that Food Banks were started in the early 1980's as a stop gap measure during a recession, only now to have become institutions in most cities. While I celebrate the creation of the Brookfield Community Food Cupboard, I would celebrate more if it wasn't needed.
- We might know that our money story includes lots of debate about levels of taxation and fairness in taxation.
- We might know that we pay sports athletes and entertainers millions of dollars a year, while teachers and nurses, childcare workers and personal support workers are not seen to be worth nearly as much.

So there are other things that we could describe as our society's money story.

While we remember our society's money story, we also participate in it to varying levels and our economic realities can change unexpectedly.

Mostly our society's money story is based on "there is not enough for everyone, so we compete",

The ladder of status, of worth, of success is a pretty powerful image in our society and world.

And yet, at the Passover table, even Judas experienced a generosity of bread, of grace, of love. The story tells us that Jesus knew exactly what Judas was up to. Jesus knew the turmoil in Judas' soul. Jesus knew the consequences of what Judas would do, and yet Jesus included him and invited him to remember. "This do in remembrance of me."

The beginning point of Our money story as people of God, as followers of Jesus is grace and generosity. Over and over again, the people of God were invited to give thanks for that generosity and to live out that generosity. Over and over again, Jesus welcomed and included those who had been cast off the ladder of status and worth and they were given a place at the table.

So, as we remember, as we reflect on our money story, we may do some thinking about the messages that have shaped who we are and messages we convey about what we value and what is important.

Too often that is portrayed as a spiritual goal, but it's a human goal towards growth and

fulfillment. And it can be humbling to remember that we really are journeying in the wilderness, in gratitude and trust - oh there is some grumbling and fear - mixed in. Holy manna is our food as we seek ways to live this conflicted path of being followers of Jesus, seekers of the Kin-dom of God, as we live in a world so desperately in need of hope, of compassion, of respect and dignity for all.

Give us each day our daily bread. Give us each daily vision to see beyond ourselves.
Give us each day courage to live generously.

Amen.