Things That Matter: Having Enough

Exodus 16: 9-21

2 Corinthians 8: 8-15

*[These notes are intended for distribution as a worship aid. The notes may differ from the actual sermon as it is delivered. May God’s Spirit use these notes and the words that accompany them for goodness and grace – JLA]*

It is the middle of summer. Many of you have had some sort of summer camp experience. Maybe with the Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts or at a church camp or summer camp or space camp – or something like one of these. A staple of any kind of summer camp are the skits. There are different formats, but they are repetitive.

One skit that I first recall seeing at a church camp and then at others, including at summer camp and Scout camps – both as a youth and as an adult – is the skit of the royal papers. It can be greatly elaborated upon but the nub is this: a king is expecting the delivery of royal papers. The first servant arrives with a large paperback book. The king denounces this – these are not the royal papers – away with him! The second servant arrives with a check – these are not the royal papers – away with him! The 3rd and final servant arrives with a roll of toilet paper and the king exclaims – *these are the royal papers* – and then proceeds to run off the stage.

It is corny. A little crude. But we are living in a time when having papers is getting to be a very serious matter.

There are all sorts of reasons to maintain proper boundaries in our lives – in our personal lives, professional work and in realms of community, nation and world. Boundaries provide definition. They tell us where one of us ends and another begins. Yet boundaries also allow for cooperation and collaboration. We live in the midst of a crisis of our connections not only in our personal lives, but also in larger political, social and economic ways as well.

We are not the first people in the history of the world to struggle with these issues. As a matter of perspective, we are a speck of time and space in the vast cosmos. As the Psalmist says [8: 3-4]

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| NRSV | The Message |
| When I look at your heavens, the work ofyour fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established;what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? | I look up at your macro-skies, dark and enormous, your handmade sky-jewelry,Moon and stars mounted in their settings. Then I look at my micro-self and wonder,Why do you bother with us? Why take a second look our way?  |

Yet we struggle with our place in the cosmos. And we struggle with each other. We hear news stories of confrontations involving high profile individuals being asked to leave restaurants or being taunted by a crowd and in the next cycle there is the story of an 8-year-old girl reported to the police for selling water bottles without a license on the sidewalk. There was a graduate student who fell asleep in the lobby of her dorm and another student called the police. And another account of a group of young adults staying in a rental property booked through one of the popular short term apps being reported to police because they didn’t say hello to a neighbor.

We live in a time of swift and sudden changes in our world. But we are not the first group of people to encounter this reality. *Fiddler on the Roof* is a musical of stage and screen that tells the story of Russian Jewish peasants in the early 1900s as they deal with all sorts of changes. There are the changes in the world while there are also changes in their village.

The Fiddler represents the traditions that help the villagers keep their balance. One tradition central to keeping the community together is that of a matchmaker who arranges marriage. The main character Tevye and his wife Golde are poor. They have 5 daughters who must have these arrange marriages. But Tevye is a milk man and does not have much to offer for a dowry. But the daughters have gotten other ideas – they want to marry not because it is arranged but because of love.

The second daughter, Hodel becomes enchanted with a wandering teacher and radical, Perchik. He likes her and she likes him. Their conversation goes something like this:

*I want to discuss a political question with you. The question of marriage.*

Marriage as political? Perchik the radical says – *the relationship between a man and a woman has a socioeconomic base. Marriage must be founded on mutual beliefes. A common attitude and philosophy towards society . .*

Hodel interrupts him – *and affection?*

*Well, yes, of course, he continues. That is also necessary . . I am personally in favor of such a socioeconomic relationship.*

*You are asking me to marry you..*

*Well . . . in a theoretical sense . . . Yes. I am.*

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0067093/quotes/?tab=qt&ref_=tt_trv_qu>

Marriage as a socioeconomic arrangement? Marriage as a political question?

In such connections how do you know when there is enough? What is enough? It is a question as old as . . . well, as old as Exodus!

The first week or so I was with you as one of your pastors, I was with one of the Lenten small group studies. I don’t remember how it came up, but someone brought up this question of what is enough. Someone said – again, I can attribute who it was – said that they remembered Dave Fry teaching about seeing things with the eyes of abundance or of scarcity. How you see things impacts how you evaluate where you are.

I was really impressed. I’m glad that one of Dave’s legacies was to leave that with you. The theologian Walter Brueggemann wrote several articles and books that amplified that idea. One that appeared in The Christian Century in 1999 was titled: *The liturgy of abundance, the myth of scarcity.* [March 24-31, 1999, Pp. 342-347]

Brueggemann is a powerful writer who scours the biblical record as he makes the case that all too often we see the world as if there is not enough. Yet God made an abundant creation. And God makes abundant provisions for God’s children. In the wilderness when the children of Israel were complaining of not having enough to eat, the Lord provided food. It was so disorienting that the people called it manna – the English word is a transliteration of Hebrew that means – *What is it?*

What is it? It’s food to eat – bread from heaven and later quail as well! What is it?

But Bruegemman didn’t just make this connection. Paul did it in 2 Corinthians 8. There Paul quotes the verses – *The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.* There was enough! The Lord provided even in a place of seeming desolation.

What does it mean to have enough? It is a spiritual as well as an economic and political question.

Often “we” – whoever the “we” is – wants to answer questions for everyone. You may hear someone say – “the US is a Christian nation.” No it is not. It is a nation in which Christianity has been high influential and involved. But we are not a Christian nation – never intended to be.

Our ancestors who came here often had disagreements among themselves. The Massachusetts Bay Colony was founded with the Congregational Church at its center. But when Roger Williams came as a minister with some theological – and political – challenges to the order of things he was expelled. He became the founder of the colony of Rhode Island and also known as the founder of the Baptist church in what we now call the USA. It was not harmonious and pretty. Much of the history of our nation has people from certain faith traditions doing things to others in the name of faith.

 In the 1920s, a Methodist man went on the porch of the rectory of a Roman Catholic church in Birmingham, Alabama and shot the priest. The reason – the priest had conducted a wedding for the man’s daughter and a man who was Catholic. He was arrested and tried for murder. The jury of 12 white Protestant men found him not guilty.

So often when we consider if we have enough we say we do not. It is easy to focus on what is not here. It is easy to lament tragedies that went on before us. It might be easy for some to be discouraged by the tone of conversation and argumentation in our day. There are things that are bad and need to be named. No doubt about it.

Yet we also need to consider where we have come from on the way to where we are going. The story arc of the Bible is that we have come from a good creation yet ran aground in our human condition. But God provided for us – in the beginning and in the midst of all our trouble. God sent Jesus to be incarnate the reality of the divine with us. And then through the Holy Spirit sustain us for what will come.

We struggle with what we have. If left to our own devices, we never have enough. It is easy to let fear drive us apart. Our fear can be of the larger political world or for our own particular circumstances.

Martin Nieimoller was a German pastor who opposed Adolf Hitler. As part of the leadership of the Evangelical Lutheran Church he met with Hitler in 1933. He didn’t say anything at that meeting. When he got home, his wife asked him what he had learned that day. He said: *I discovered that Herr Hitler is a terribly frightened man.*

[Christian Century, p. 342]

Based on Nieimoller’s reports, Walter Brueggemann writes that Hitler was like the Pharaoh in Egypt who taught the Children of Israel to fear. The Pharaoh feared he would not have enough. Anyone who resides in the fear of not having enough can fall prey to the worst of the human condition. And if you accept that fear long enough you will reject the abundance that the Lord provides in the manna that comes our way.

PHPC you have been taught that there is a line between fear of scarcity and the hope of abundance. You have lived into that hope. You have reached out through many mission projects, Vacation Bible School, classes and studies for children, youth and adults. And the ongoing *Glorious Past – Bold Future* capital campaign is an ongoing testimony to your trust not just of what has been but also an affirmation that you believe in what will be.

Today as we gather to share communion let us remember that it is because of God’s love in Jesus Christ we are able to share of our total selves for the goodness and grace of God. That is enough for this moment. May we be fed and nurtured for all future moments on our journey as persevere connecting faith in Jesus Christ with our everyday lives.

Joel L. Alvis, Jr., Ph.D.

Pleasant Hill Presbyterian Church

Duluth, GA

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