

September 2023

Belton Joyner, Jr - *Based on the scripture lessons from Cokesbury's Adult Bible Study Series*

September 3rd - Text: Exodus 16:2-19, 31-32
“Provisions of Enough in the Wilderness”

One of my favorite verses in the Bible is Exodus 16:15. God has provided food for a hungry people and they look at it and mutter, “What is it?” How often has God tried to give me a gift and I looked at it and wondered, “What’s going on? What is it?” When God answers my prayer in a way different from what I expect, I might not recognize the gift God wants to give.

The Hebrew children called this bread “manna” (Exodus 16:31). The funny thing is that “manna” is the Hebrew mān hū for “What is it?”

Exodus 16:16 offers some wisdom for us to use in the distribution of food in the twenty-first century. God’s will (“The Lord has commanded...”) is that everyone has enough and no one has more at the expense of those with less. The church I attend has a “Little Free Pantry.” It is a large container that is always unlocked. It has in it all sorts of daily foods. Located in the church parking lot on a busy city street, it is emptied almost every day. I was inspired by what I heard one of the “clients” say the other day. He said, “I could probably use another can of beans and some of that soup, but I think I ought to leave it for someone who hasn’t got here yet.”

Take a moment to read 2 Corinthians 8:8-15. Those verses are the

insights of the apostle Paul on this matter of the fair balance between abundance and need. It is interesting to note that Paul offers his observations not as a commandment (v. 8), but as a way of testing the genuineness of our love for others.

Maybe I do not have extra food resources to share. Maybe I do not have spare financial accounts. Maybe I do not have clothes that pile up unused. But, what about my time? Can I share some of it with a lonely person? But, what about my prayer energy? Can I expand the range of those for whom I pray? But, what about my joy in church fellowship? Can I invite an “outsider” to be part of the gathered community?

In this Exodus text, there is a steady prompt to handle things differently on the Sabbath (vv. 22-30). I see this as a reminder that the final focus in all of this is to be on God, the God of us all.

What Someone Else Has Said:
In *Daily Devotions for Die-Hard Fans* (Extra Point Publishers), Ed McMinn has written: “Whether it’s fast food or home-cooked, everything we eat is a gift from God secured through a divine plan in which some plants and animals have given up their lives....That’s worth a thank you!”

Prayer:
As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “You provide, O Lord...”

September 10th - Text: 1 Kings 19:1-8
“Nourishment in Famine, Strength for the Journey”

You would think that it would be a great moment for Elijah. He had just had a showdown competition with the prophets of Baal and Elijah had won (1 Kings 18:38-40). (Charles Wesley wrote a hymn about the follow-up celebration—1 Kings 18:41-46—541 in The United Methodist Hymnal). But things turned sour for Elijah. When Queen Jezebel found out that Elijah had humiliated her favorites and indeed that Elijah had done them in (1 Kings 18:40), she sent a messenger to tell Elijah that she was going to get revenge and have him killed.

Even though Elijah had been blessed as a servant of God’s victory, now he was frightened so much that he fled out into the wilderness (1 Kings 19:3). Doesn’t that sound a bit like us? God has been our strength and shield through all of life, but if life throws us a curve ball, we run for the dugout, not bothering to take a turn at bat. What happened to our confidence in God?

Things were so overwhelming for Elijah that he wished he were dead (v. 4). But food and drink showed up (v. 6) and thus it was for the forty days and forty nights it took Elijah to get to Horeb (v. 8)....There the word of the Lord came to him (1 Kings 19:9).

I got to thinking about it. When life’s journey gets challenging, do I assume that God will desert me? How do I approach the hard moments? What is my “solitary broom tree” (1 Kings 19:4)?

Elijah discovered that the gifts of God sometimes come one day at a time. Elijah discovered that God does not let go of us even when we let go of God. Elijah discovered what the hymn writer Thomas Chisholm expressed as “strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow” (140, The United Methodist Hymnal).

Elijah was one of the “great ones.” He was a strong and effective prophet. Nevertheless, he also had the time of despair and uncertainty. God found a way to break through that emptiness and to restore Elijah’s meaning and purposefulness. Let us be encouraged that moments of despair do not mean that God is through with us. God is going to go with us to tomorrow and then to tomorrow’s tomorrow.

What Someone Else Has Said:
Robert P. Jones (*White Too Long*, Simon and Schuster) quotes a plaque at National Memorial in Montgomery, Alabama: “We will remember with hope because hopelessness is the enemy of justice, with courage because peace requires bravery, with persistence because justice is a constant struggle, with faith because we shall overcome.”

Prayer:
As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “God of Yesterday, move with me this day, and point me toward Your tomorrow...”

Please take a moment to share your thoughts about Rev. Dr. Joyner’s Bible Study.
Please complete survey, cut and mail to

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