

What Is Enough?

What is enough? It seems that is a very difficult question for us to answer as individuals, as a community or as a society. When you go to the dictionary for the definition of this word, unlike many words whose meanings found there are helpful and clarifying...this one although very simple...really does not provide much in the way of clarification...at least not in the sense of quantification which is what we, like Peter with his question about how often he needed to forgive are usually looking for. The definition we find is simply that enough is as much or as many as is required. It does not say as required for what. That certainly leaves the field wide open as far as establishing any standard amount for what is required in terms of an amount...what is required can be such a wide variable depending on the situation and who is asking the question. This is easily seen by the words used as synonyms for enough; these include: sufficient, adequate, ample, and also abundant. Those words carry vastly different connotations, don't they? They can mean very different things when put into practical and real-life situation where quantifications are being considered, like what is a living wage? And what seems adequate or sufficient to us in our situation may be very different to someone struggling to pay off student loans or maybe to someone living in a third world country, where an amount may seem like an abundant amount. As we have journeyed through these last few weeks of Matthew's narrative it seems to me that the message recorded there is loudly proclaiming how interconnected everything in it is when viewed as describing God's kingdom; how all these themes illustrate that we are called to be in community..living together...caring for and about one another. If that is the case, then when we come to this question of enough we need to think about these connections in terms of community. As we consider what our scripture has to tell us about this concept of "enough" it seems that concept of perspective looms large. Within the concept of perspective we discovered insights about forgiveness and our call to love as we are loved. As I have considered these texts, I have also considered how these themes are brought forth in the prayer which we include in our worship service every Sunday where our prayer asks that we forgive as we are forgiven, and also to be given this day our daily bread thereby showing our trust in God's provision for us. That phrase about daily bread is in many ways a recognition that our relationship with God depends on that foundation of trust in God's faithful provision for our welfare. That phrase about daily bread resonates strongly with the history of the passage read this morning from Exodus 16. Exodus 16 narrates one of the times when those folks who had cried out to the Lord about the conditions of slavery in Egypt under Pharaoh begin to remember those times differently on their journey into freedom which takes them into the wilderness. Our text begins "The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness." They now remember those times in Egypt this manner: that they "sat by the fleshpot and ate our fill of bread". God has already led them to water in this wilderness, but looking around now they don't see a source of bread, so they don't trust that God will provide for them. So their complaint is "you have

brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” Hearing these complaints, the Lord tells Moses that they will be provided for but in a particular way. This way is going to be in a way that will test them and will build their trust. “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.’” They were to only gather enough for that day’s needs. Although our text does not include this, the specific amount they were to gather was given. Some gathered more, some less. This bread which then rained from heaven during the night became known as manna. On the sixth day they were told to gather twice the normal amount for there would be none on the seventh day, the Sabbath day which was to be set aside. As usual, there were some among the people who failed to listen to these instructions. Those who gathered more than the “enough”, more than was needed and tried to hoard it, found that it spoiled. Those who did not gather the double on the sixth day found that on the Sabbath morn, there was no manna to be gathered. The doubled amount was to be baked and was fine on the Sabbath, it did not spoil. The Lord’s instructions were for them to take from what was provided for their needs...no more...no less. Any extra they took did not provide them with an abundance which was not needed. God actually gave them quail in the evening and the manna appeared in the morning...they were well provisioned. And this continued until they reached and entered the Promised Land which then provided them. This provision of manna and quail continued for the entire wilderness journey despite the many times they were disobedient and angered the Lord. What is stressed in the Lord’s instructions to the people is that each family is to gather enough for their needs...not to take extra...and do not skimp...gather enough for their needs. Verse 16 continues: “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.” When they did this but some thought to save some by not using it all, despite being told not to leave any; they found that the left-over was spoiled the next day. Again, the issue was to trust that God would provide the next day as well: daily bread for needs. When we are considering this concept of enough we know that our situation resembles the Hebrew people’s there in the wilderness in only some ways. God is our guide through the wilderness of this broken world, but much of the institutions which govern our daily lives are controlled by the brokenness of the world. We live in a world of institutions which we have created which are not governed by the rules of the kingdom. Manna does not appear each morning for us to gather what we need each day. This leaves us with that determination of quantifying what is enough...to defining the meaning of enough for ourselves. What are the appropriate synonyms for the enough in our lives as we go about separating the enough for our needs from the enough we gather for our desires and our wants? Our reading from Matthew’s gospel is another parable where Jesus is describing relationships within the kingdom of heaven. This parable is usually described as the parable of the workers or laborers in the vineyard. It is a very familiar narrative where the assigned role of the landowner is given to God. This

landowner is depicted as going to the local labor market and hiring workers for his vineyard beginning early in the morning, then again at nine, and at noon, and at three and then finally at five in the early evening. He made arrangements with the first workers to pay the usual daily wage, and they agreed. With those he hired later in the day, he told them that he would pay them what was right...the amount was not named. At the end of the day when the workers were given their pay, those who were hired last were given their pay first...and it was the usual daily wage. In fact, the usual daily wage was given to all those who had been hired and worked in the landowner's vineyard that day. The key to this parable comes when those who were hired first come and receive their pay is verse 10: "Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.'" The landowner's reply is: "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage?" Those who worked longest received what they the agreed amount which was enough at the time, but when they saw others receiving the same amount, they wanted more...what they received was no longer enough. The landowner's question to them bases his decision on being allowed to do what he chooses with what belongs to him and asks if they are envious because he is generous. Often when we enter into this parable our sympathies are with the laborers who spent the most time in the vineyard...our response is that it isn't fair that in some way they only got the wage they agreed to while those who came later got the same...we seem to believe they should have received a bonus...or those who came later should have received less...we don't really care...but there should have been a difference...somehow that everyone who went into the vineyard got the usual daily wage does not fit with our understanding of how things work. But that is how Jesus is telling us it is how thing should work. Jesus is telling us that all should be able to receive the usual daily wage...and will in the kingdom...because in this parable the landowner is indeed our Lord but what is received at the end of the day is not really a "wage" but a gift. What is received at the end of the day, no matter what time you come and accept the invitation to come into the kingdom is God's gift of grace. God does not apportion the love, the grace or forgiveness that is given. God desires that there be abundant life for all of us...and for that to happen on earth as it does in heaven...we have to learn that to quit looking at the world through the lens that the world teaches...that of scarcity...and learn to view the world as God does...God tells us that provision will be made if we learn to trust...if we learn to care for each other as we are called to do by the guidance given to us...because then there will truly be enough. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.