

Scripture Readings and Sermon

September 20, 2020 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Exodus 15:22, 16:2-8, 13-15

(Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

With the Egyptian army in ruins behind them, the Israelites have to face their greatest challenge - the wilderness. While the patriarchs in Genesis came from a Bedouin culture who knew how to live in the desert, their descendants had become accustomed to the urban and farm life of Egypt. Their first challenge was to find water (15:23-27). Once they left the oasis, however, food soon became the issue. From the defeat of the Egyptian army to the issues of water and food, the Israelites were slowly being taught to rely on God. Unfortunately, they often focused on Moses and Aaron rather than God. Moses did not help the matter when he promised Manna *and Quail* when the LORD only promised Manna. These assumptions by Moses leading up to bringing water from a rock by striking it against God's will (Numbers 20:7-12) would ultimately end in Moses not entering the promised land (Numbers 27:12-14). Jesus points out this confusion when he talks to the people about who it was that truly gave the Manna (John 6:32)

Exodus 16:7 "in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD"

Are knowing that God will provide and waiting for God to provide two different things?
How often has waiting until morning helped? Do we surrender to fear too quickly?
How do you reconcile the two statements "God will provide" and "God helps those who help themselves"?

Commentary on Matthew 19:23, 25-27, 29-20:16 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

While the parable of the first and the last teaches an important point about who the laborer's are and who the landowner is, it should be viewed as a continuation of the question asked in 19:27. After telling the rich man that he had to give up all he owned, Peter points out that the disciples have left everything to follow Jesus. While Jesus affirms their sacrifice, he quickly points out that God owes them nothing but rather that they owe God everything. Therefore all who work for the kingdom of God and do God's will are rewarded based on God's judgment and not human judgment. This is made clear in the parable. Notice that the workers are paid as the result of doing God's will and not length of dedication or cost of discipleship. When God calls, either early in life or late in life, the point is to do God's will and not self gratification through a sense of worthiness. God's fairness is based on the attitude of the heart and not pious actions.

Matthew 20:16 "So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

Does it help to understand the parable by knowing Peter's question?
If you were a disciple who gave up everything, would you expect more from Jesus?
Have you ever been one of those who arrived late or one of those who arrived early?
How do you feel with "new" Christians want to change "your" church?

Commentary on Philippians 1:15-17, 20-28

(Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

Paul's statement "living is Christ and dying is gain" should be read within the context of his imprisonment. After nearly 20 years of missionary ministry (assuming his first journey in Act 13 began around 46 A.D. and the letter was written after his last journey to Rome in Acts 28 around 63 A.D), Paul finds himself in prison in Rome and facing the possibility of death. It has been a long twenty years and Paul is at peace with whatever happens in Rome. His legacy of spreading the good news now rests with the congregations he helped to found. Like any aging parent, Paul wants his children to live into the legacy he has provided and "live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ".

Even while facing his own opponents, Paul urges those in Philippi to "in no way intimidated by your opponents." Therefore his statement about "dying is gain" should not be seen as a death wish but rather a statement of assurance in his salvation through Christ Jesus. By sharing his faith, Paul is hoping to encourage the church in Philippi to remain strong in their faith.

Philippians 1:27 "live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ"

Can you hear both the fatigue and the faith in Paul's voice from prison?

When have you been at peace with a decision that might go for or against you?

Despite stress, anxiety, and 2020, do you live a life worthy of the gospel?

What does it mean to worthy of the gospel? Do you accept *all* of his teachings?

Like St. Francis, can you proclaim Christ more without speaking?

Sermon "Quality Workmanship" ([*Sermon Video*](#))

Growing up, I was told that our family motto was "Do Well, Doubt Not". This was later combined with the Cub Scout's, "Do your Best" and my dad's personal favorite, "Do It, Do it Right, Do it right Now!" Well, best, and right all point to an ethic of workmanship that was expected in everything that I did in school, scouts, family, or life. Quality workmanship, however, requires several key components.

The first component of quality workmanship is learning to follow instruction. Following instruction begins by setting aside an individual agenda and listening. Sometimes the instruction only makes sense after the project is complete. Learning any skill requires a degree of humility and selflessness. This is especially true when we are learning to follow God and not the world. When God was trying to teach the Israelites how to live in the desert, they spent more time complaining than they did listening and following instruction. Once the basic instructions are learned, the disciple is ready for the next component of developing an ethic of quality workmanship.

The difference between a vocation and a job is that a job is for the money and a vocation is a calling that expresses the gifts, talents, and passion of an individual. It takes time to fully develop a vocation and a focus on the craft. The second component of quality workmanship is learning to not worry about how other people may work but rather focus on the quality of the work that you do. The parable of the workers told by Jesus is a parable about people doing a job rather than a vocation. They complain about fair pay rather than the quality of the job they did. In the larger context of the gospel, Jesus was moving the disciples away from viewing following Jesus as learning a new job as rabbis but rather as a vocation in the kingdom of God. As a vocation, the disciples shouldn't be focused on if the rich get into heaven or what place they will have in the throne room. Instead, they should be focused on how to give their utmost for His highest. Quality workmanship comes from viewing the task not as a job which is measured by pay but as a vocation in which a well done task is the reward.

This feeling of reward leads to the last component of quality workmanship. A completed project should positively reflect upon the person who did the work. Was it the best the person could do? Was it worthy of the person's skills and talents? Is it a work of quality or convenience? Paul tells us to live a life worthy of Christ. If we are bought with his blood and covered by his grace, do our actions reflect the glory of God and the goodness of His kingdom? Following God means living a life in pursuit of quality workmanship because we are ultimately working for God. Half measures and complaints about others does not reflect our profession that Jesus is our Lord and Savior. If Jesus is our Lord, then why do we act as if he is on holiday? If Jesus is our Savior, then why do we act like every political and economic issue is going to mean the end of our life? If we are one in the Body of Christ, then why do we act like malignant cancer attacking the other parts of the body? Our life in Christ is our ultimate project and we have to ask ourselves if we are committed to quality workmanship or do we accept the poor workmanship of the world we live in. Are you living a life worthy of Christ - worthy of all the Master has done for you?