

Sermon - 09/20/20
Ps 105:2-15; Ex 16:1-6; Phil 1:21-30; Mt 20:1-16
God's Presence – God's Provision

I wish we could find the ark of the covenant that Israel kept in the tabernacle in the Sinai for forty years. The Bible says it contained the stone tablets of the Law, the rod of Aaron that budded and the jar of manna. That is, the bread that fell like dew on the ground. Wouldn't that be something to see?

Perhaps you have pondered this mystery. Many archaeologists and ancient historians have searched for the ark. It has vanished. There are many fantastic theories about where it is. Wherever it wound up, it was at the heart of worship. It was the assurance of God's presence. It was treated with respect and handled carefully. It was an object of great power. Recall that the priests carried the ark ahead of the army when Israel went to war. Also, when the ark was captured by the Philistines it caused trouble and disease in their camp. The Philistines wound up returning the ark to Israel.

There is the presence of God – and then there is the presence of God. There is God's favor. There is God's disfavor. God's presence is attested by the writers of the Bible and by our human capacity to understand the truth of God's provision. Where do you direct your thanks for the magnificent sunset or sunrise? A soaring hawk over a field? The beauty of a full-blown rose? The first asparagus of spring? God-consciousness is present in our nature. We are created in God's image. We have no ark among us. The temple in Jerusalem, where it was enshrined, is gone. What are our indicators of God's presence, in our time of history?

This provision of God – the supplying of our needs and even our desires – used to be called Providence. The dictionary defines Providence as: "the protective care of God...as a spiritual power." This is known as God's will or divine intervention...Some choose to call it fate, destiny, nemesis, kismet or the stars."

(googledictionary.com)

The list of what is graciously given to us in creation is very long, including our proximity to other planets, the earth-to-moon distance – many other factors – more than we have time for today. Let's consider a short list of earth's conditions that make life possible:

1. Breathable oxygen
2. Presence of water. This the most obvious thing one would come up with. Fresh water is needed by all creatures to survive and thrive on the Earth.
3. Presence of an atmosphere that contains just the right amounts of gases that are required for survival of living species. By volume, dry air contains 78.09% nitrogen, 20.95% oxygen, 0.93% argon, 0.039% carbon dioxide, and small amounts of other gases. Air also contains a variable amount of water vapor, on average around 1% at sea level, and 0.4% over the entire atmosphere.
4. The temperature of the Earth is also habitable; not too low at night and nor too high during the day, so far. The presence of greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide, methane etc. also substantiates this fact.
5. Radiant energy of the sun. Because of the sun's light plants are able perform photosynthesis and make food for all living organisms on the planet except anaerobic bacteria
6. There are the most essential elements that make up all the matter in the world and thus make our survival possible. Nitrogen, carbon, oxygen sulfur etc. make up nitrogenous bases, phosphate molecules from which come all the proteins and nutrients required by living things. (www.quora.com accessed 9-10-20)

Rarely do we think about all this – how freely and lovingly God provides all we need. Jesus' miracles, told in the four gospels, reveal His divine nature as the Son of God. He is the master of the elements, of the plants and animals, the sea and its weather – of human wellness and healing. Jesus Christ is the Ruler of heaven and earth. When He walked the earth as a mortal in the 1st c. AD He always attributed all power to His Heavenly Father. And He showed again and again the compassionate and holy character of God to everybody. God provides.

In this parable of the laborers in the vineyard Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a landowner who went out early to hire workers. He agreed with the workers to pay a denarius for the day. This landowner keeps coming back to see

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whether there are more willing workers. He went out at the third hour, at the sixth hour, at the ninth hour and finally at the eleventh hour. Work starts at daylight (say 6:00 a.m.) – so that quitting time would be dusk (6:00 p.m.) A long hot day, then you pick up your pay, right?

The landowner (who is God the Father) pays the workers hired at the eleventh hour the full denarius. He pays them first. That is a day's pay for an hour's work. Those who hired on at dawn get – a denarius. It is a day's wage. Is this fair?

We are the workers in the vineyard of the Lord. What is the pay scale for kingdom labor? Are you working for the Lord? What do you expect to get?

The twelve-hour day is all of time. Those who hired on at dawn served the Lord their whole lives, and many have passed away. Remember Abraham & Sarah, Isaac & Rebecca, Jacob (Leah and Rachel), Joseph, Moses. In every age, the Lord comes to the marketplace seeking laborers – to work His vineyard. Do we work for the denarius? Credit to our soul? Stars in our crown?

What about the One who breathed the breath of life into you? How do you value that breath? What about the air? The water you drink? The food you eat?

What's the value of God's presence – the value of His beloved Son? Our answers reveal our world-view – our philosophy of life. Do you ask for God to be generous with you, but not with your fellow laborers? Is that fair?

Remember the children of Israel – pining and complaining out in the Sinai – “we want lamb stew – we want leeks and melons! We are starving, Moses. We'd rather have died in Egypt than suffer like this!”

God's provides the bread of heaven. God rewards His children with His presence. God's character is entirely compassionate – entirely loving. Amen.