

Sunday, September 24, 2023 – Easter Hill United Methodist Church
Bible Study
“The Burden of the Day
Exodus 16:2-15 and Matthew 20:1-16

Open with a word of prayer

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, have participants answer, “What is an unwanted gift you received that turned out to be a blessing?” What changed your opinion and attitude about the gift?

Exodus 16:2-15. Context. The thanksgiving and celebration that the Israelites experienced when God saved them from the Egyptians quickly changed as they realized that in the wilderness where God and Moses had taken them there was no water or food. All of a sudden, slavery in Egypt didn’t look so bad – at least there they always had enough to eat. This week’s reading relates their complaint – one that never seems to end – and God’s response: sending quail and bread from heaven. The bread they called “manna,” derived from the question: “what is it?” As to the composition of manna, there are various rationalistic theories to explain it: an aromatic resin secreted by trees; “honeydew” secreted by aphid-like insects. But in the end, we’re still left with the question, “what is it?” In John’s Gospel, Jesus comments on this passage, saying that he is the true bread from heaven, the “panis angelicus” of César Franck’s famous anthem (the lyrics taken from a hymn of Thomas Aquinas written for the feast of Corpus Christi).

Matthew 20:1-16. Context. This week’s reading, the parable of the landowner and the laborers in the vineyard, concludes a section that deals with Jesus’ teachings about the rewards of the kingdom. As Jesus first told this parable, he likely meant it to counter his critics, saying that God doesn’t play by our rules and that all are welcomed equally into God’s family. As Matthew has adapted it, the parable becomes an allegory that focuses on the grace of salvation that is the same for everyone who responds to Jesus’ call to discipleship, and on the misplaced resentment of those who have been “working in the vineyard” since dawn, expecting some kind of preferment.

Read Exodus 16:2-15

What touches your heart, what do you hear in the scripture, what questions do you have, or what doesn’t make sense to you in the text?

Read Matthew 20:1-16

What touches your heart, what do you hear in the scripture, what questions do you have, or what doesn't make sense to you in the text?

Read Exodus 16:2-15 again -

Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

Read Matthew 20:1-16 again -

Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

- Read Exodus 16:2-15 aloud in your group. It might be familiar to you, or you might find some parts of this biblical story surprising. What does this encounter tell you about God? How is this consistent or inconsistent with your understanding of the character or nature of God?
- *“The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness”* (Exodus 16:2). Skim Exodus 15 to find out the events that precede this moment in the wilderness. How do you see the attitude of the people shift from Exodus 15 to Exodus 16? What does this tell you about God? What does this tell you about human nature? Where do you see people move from gratitude to grumbling today?
- In the Matthew 20 text, the laborers first complained because they had not received more wages than those who worked fewer hours. How do you think they would have felt when they heard the response from the landowner in verse 15, *“Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?”* (NRSV) What lessons might this parable have for Christians today?
- It is said, *“God provides, we gather, and we share.”* What comes to mind when considering our responsibility to gather and share God's provisions, just as the people of God worked to gather manna and labor in the vineyard? How might it look for your congregation to take this responsibility on as a part of its mission? What are the provisions that you have gathered that you can joyfully share with others?
- *“Settling in for the long haul, in this faith journey, is to acknowledge that much of what we've learned about how the world works doesn't fit us anymore.”* What

does that mean to you? How would you explain this to someone outside of a community of faith? How do your life choices and behavior reflect this change in worldview?

Closing Reflection Question

How is this scripture calling you to change, to see, to be or what might it be calling you to do?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). After all, have shared, end by praying the following or a similar prayer:

Loving God, you have provided for us again and again along our journey of life. Forgive us for taking your provisions for granted or for resenting your generosity toward others. Pour out your mercy upon us and change our hearts to be fully content in you. In the name of Jesus, we pray, **Amen.**

And now we pray The Lord's Prayer....

Our Father who art in Heaven
 hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
 on earth as it is in Heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,
 as we forgive those who trespass against us.
Lead us not into temptation
 but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power
 and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.