

“Our Money Story: Remember”
Exodus 16:1-12 & Luke 22:1-6

As we begin this journey into exploring our money story, it is interesting to reflect on our panic shopping during this pandemic. Steven Taylor, clinical psychologist and author of *The Psychology of Pandemics*, argues that panic-buying is an attempt to regain control when we experience anxiety and uncertainty. Taylor writes, “Under circumstances like these, people feel the need to do something that is proportionate to what they perceive is the level of the crisis... This is a dramatic event, therefore a dramatic response is required, so that leads to people throwing money at things in hopes of protecting themselves.”

This is just one example of how money and resources hold power over us instead of being used to help us fulfill our purposes in life. The pandemic brought out the best and the worst in us in terms of our relationship to money. It brought out our great fears of scarcity and it also brought out our generosity and willingness to help others in their time of need.

It is important to pause and reflect on our money story because it is often hidden from us and yet it impacts our actions in so many ways. From an early age, we learn how to deal with money and more often than not, what we learn is often based in a mentality of scarcity, anxiety, and fear. These are the dominant themes in our culture. Even if we grow up in a household that puts money in its proper place, it is hard to escape the cultural influences around us promising us happiness, esteem, and safety the more money and resources we have. My prayer is that through this journey of “Our Money Story,” we will be able to find new ways to deal with money that will help us not just as individuals but also as a community.

As part of becoming aware of our money story we will look at God’s story of money to help anchor us in the real story of money. Two Bible stories help us see God’s story of abundance and provision in comparison to our sense of fear and scarcity. The first one comes from the journey of the Israelites in the wilderness after they escaped slavery in Egypt under the leadership of Moses. The people of Israel needed to be formed by a different story than that of greed, scarcity, and exploitation. They needed to relearn and to experience God’s story of abundance, generosity and love. Their whole time in the wilderness was about living by God’s story instead of Pharaoh’s story. The wilderness was tough because the people did not have access to food and water in the same way they did in Egypt. Even though slavery meant oppression, they at least had food, water, and shelter. So the people struggled to learn to live into their new freedom and into God’s provision for them being a daily test of trust. The wilderness made them face their worst fears of survival. It was their pandemic moment! They had to dig deep and learn to trust God each day. Because of their story of scarcity and the realities of fear around them, they complained to Moses. They reminisced about the past. Even though their past was that of slavery, they still longed for the safety of the devil they knew over the uncertainty of their life in the desert.

Moses took their complaining and their fears to God and God opened their eyes to the resources of the desert, of the quail and the resin that is often found in the Sinai desert from tamarisk trees. But God reminded them that these resources were only good for what was needed to survive for one day only. No hoarding or greed was possible with this

kind of food which God provided. The people of God had to learn to trust in God every day for the provisions of their lives.

There is an interesting twist in our story for this Sunday. When God responds to the people's cry for food in the wilderness, they ask about the flakey substance, the tamarisk resin, and what it was supposed to be. They ask, "What is it?" In Hebrew this is what the word "manna" means. So, basically, they called the food they received "what is it?" I cannot help but see the irony of this name for the food they received in light of the name God gave to Moses. If we put those two names side by side, we would see the great irony. The name of the God they were supposed to follow was "I will be who I will be" and the name of the food they received was "What is it?" In other words, "I will be who I will be" will give you food that you will call "what is it?" The teller of the story was trying to drive a point home here. He/She was trying to say something like this, "It is all about trust, never mind knowing the name of God and the name of the food you are given, this whole journey is about learning to trust God so that you may let go of the ways of oppression in the world."

The second Bible story is that of Christ's love and abundance being extended to all even (or especially) to those who are fearful and living by the story of scarcity as represented by Judas and his betrayal of Jesus for a price. As things were heating up in Jerusalem, the religious leaders and one of the disciples conspired to get Jesus killed and eliminate him as a threat. The story of scarcity and fear was in play and Jesus' vision of abundance and care was a major threat to that system. They felt it was important to eliminate him. Yet, Jesus did not veer off his course. He did not change the story of God's abundance. He knew what Judas was up to and yet he invited him to the feast of the Passover which he was celebrating with his disciples. He was included once more in the story of God's abundance and redemption.

These two stories remind us of the importance of knowing our money story by remembering how we were shaped in childhood and allowing God to write a new story for us. By remembering, we can recognize two things. First, we can uncover the cultural fears and lies that continue to push us to hoard and to want more. Second, we can remember how God provided for us each step of the way. The invitation this week is for us to remember our money story and also God's money story and to see which story we are living by, especially during this crisis. Take time this week to remember.

We will prepare to come to the table of Christ's abundance and grace through an affirmation of faith from Sanctified Art:

The story of God calls us to remember—
that creation was made good,
and Sabbath is necessary.

The story of God calls us to remember—
that we belong to one another,
for we are bone of bone and flesh of flesh.

The story of God calls us to remember—
that reconciliation between siblings is holy,
and slavery of any kind is evil.

The story of God calls us to remember—
that the wilderness is real,
and that God will be with us—
raining down manna and speaking in a still, small voice.

The story of God calls us to remember—
that love looks like healing the sick,
eating with the outcast,
making room for the children,
and seeing the unseen.

The story of God calls us to remember—
because if we forget, we risk making God, love, and reconciliation small.

So as we remember, may we declare—
we believe in a God who made all things good,
who stands with the suffering,
walks with us in the wilderness,
sees the overlooked,
loves with an untamed heart,
and makes room for all at God's table.
Amen.