

“The Soul of Money: The Toxic Myths of Scarcity”
Exodus 16:1-18

We will begin today with a video clip from the movie “The Wolf of Wall Street.”
<https://youtu.be/e1TGP8-IDaQ>

What are your reactions to this? It speaks to what we are often told to value. Interesting enough in this movie this man who had all the money ended up destroying his life. So all the money he had did not make him happy. There are many myths about money that we are fed each day. Myths are not simple lies or untrue beliefs. In the historical or theological sense of the word, a myth is an idea or a story that helps to shape people and cultures. The story may not be factually true, but its power is in shaping our values and belief systems. One such myth is that of scarcity or that there is not enough in our world for all of our needs. This creates a culture and a sense of fear and anxiety around money. Even if we don't have money fears ourselves, the myth of scarcity is all around us which drives us to another myth, that more is always better. This often leads people to believe that this is just the way things are, some people are winners, while others are losers in this kind of economy.

I am grateful for the many Bible stories that shows God's guidance for us to not fall into this trap of scarcity. We look this week at a great epic story that challenges our cultural myths of scarcity to replace them with God's abundance.

This is the story of the Israelites after they were delivered from slavery in Egypt. After living for 400 years under the oppressive burden of slavery because the Egyptians believed so heavily in that myth, they were delivered through the leadership of Moses. He got them out into the wilderness and was leading them to a new home, a land that was full of promise for a new way of life. But the story does not end with a fairy tale ending, “and they lived happily ever after.” Far from it, the people of Israel do not enter into the new land right away. Instead, they end up wandering the desert for a long time. Many of us who read this story often think that the people's time in the wilderness was necessary to help them shed the mentality of slavery. They had to be shaped by new stories and values. In Egypt they were so conditioned to live as slaves with crushed souls and impoverished imagination. The values of Pharaoh were about production, hoarding, and greed which were accomplished by any means necessary and at any human cost. The people of ancient Israel were part of that cost. As a result, they learned to live with fear and scarcity. They learned to survive. Their whole existence was reduced to survival. So, the people of ancient Israel needed to be formed by different values and realities: The values of respect, generosity, love, and justice, and the realities of love, peace, and trust.

But the wilderness was not an ideal place. 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. Even though we may not like the current conditions of the world, they still provide us with some security. We know the rules of this game. But if we let them go, what will the future look like?

On the outside slavery was gone from the ancient Israelites lives, but the effects of slavery were still deep within their minds, hearts and souls. The wilderness made them face their worst fears of survival. Here they were trying to make a new life for themselves only to be crushed by the realities of life in the desert. So, they did what they knew how to do best. 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. Let's listen to Exodus 16:1-18

The whole congregation of the Israelites set out from Elim; and Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. ²The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. ³The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." ⁴Then 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. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not. ⁵On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days."⁶So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "In the evening you shall know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt,⁷and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your complaining against the LORD. For what are we, that you complain against us?" ⁸And Moses said, "When the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the LORD has heard the complaining that you utter against him—what are we? Your complaining is not against us but against the LORD." ⁹Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, 'Draw near to the LORD, for he has heard your complaining.'" ¹⁰And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud.¹¹The LORD spoke to Moses and said, ¹²"I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.'"

¹³In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. ¹⁴When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. ¹⁵When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat. ¹⁶This 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.'" ¹⁷The Israelites did so, some gathering more, some less. ¹⁸But when they measured it with an omer, those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed.

They needed to learn to trust the provisions for their lives one day at a time! Think of how hard this lesson is for us, not just about money but about every aspect of our lives!

Through the manna 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 them because it would go bad. 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 week. 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 tellers of the story were trying to drive a point home here. They were 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."

As you walked in, you received little cards that have on the one side the words "Manna: What is it?" and the on the other side "Yahweh: I will be what I will be." I invite you to take a few moments to consider how these words might challenge or help you/us when it comes to our myths of scarcity, more is better, and that is just the way it is.

We will end with the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:33-34 and with a prayer from biblical scholar and teacher Walter Brueggemann.

"Seek first God's reign, and God's justice, and all these things will be given to you besides. Enough of worrying about tomorrow! Let tomorrow take care of itself. Today has troubles enough of its own." Matthew 6:33-34

Prayer from Walter Brueggemann:

On Generosity

On our own, we conclude:
there is not enough to go around
we are going to run short

of money
of love
of grades
of publications
of sex
of beer

of members
of years
of life

we should seize the day
seize our goods
seize our neighbor's goods
because there is not enough to go around

and in the midst of our perceived deficit
you come
you come giving bread in the wilderness
you come giving children at the 11th hour
you come giving homes to exiles
you come giving futures to the shut down
you come giving easter joy to the dead
you come – fleshed in Jesus.

and we watch while
the blind receive their sight
the lame walk
the lepers are cleansed
the deaf hear
the dead are raised
the poor dance and sing

We watch
and we take food we did not grow and
life we did not invent and
future that is gift and gift and gift and
families and neighbors who sustain us
when we did not deserve it.

It dawns on us – late rather than soon-
that you “give food in due season
you open your hand
and satisfy the desire of every living thing.”

By your giving, break our cycles of imagined scarcity
override our presumed deficits
quiet our anxieties of lack
transform our perceptual field to see
the abundance.....mercy upon mercy
blessing upon blessing.

Sink your generosity deep into our lives
that your muchness may expose our false lack
that endlessly receiving we may endlessly give
so that the world may be made Easter new,
without greedy lack, but only wonder,
without coercive need but only love,
without destructive greed but only praise
without aggression and invasiveness....
all things Easter new.....
all around us, toward us and
by us

all things Easter new.

Finish your creation, in wonder, love and praise. Amen.