

## “Invest in Your Talents”

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Exodus 36:1-7

Matthew 14:13-21

“ ... all the artisans who were doing every sort of task  
on the sanctuary ... said to Moses,  
‘The people are bringing much more than enough  
for doing the work that the Lord has commanded us to do.’ ”

Exodus 36:4a, 5

Let us pray... O God,  
We would like that to be our problem – that people gave too much  
and had to be restrained.

Amen

In recent weeks, I have been working a joke into my sermons  
and I’m not so sure that’s a good thing.

Because then you would be expecting a joke every time  
and next thing you know, it would become a vicious cycle  
of trying to top what was done the week before.

So, if you promise not to expect it,  
I’ll tell a joke sometimes – not all the time, but sometimes... OK? Good...

*There once was a rich man who despite all his riches,  
was diagnosed with an incurable condition and so,  
he was at the end stage of his life and near death.  
He had worked hard all his life and had made a lot of money  
and he was also a person of faith who had been very generous  
to his church and various charities –  
still, he wanted to take it with him to heaven.*

*So, he prayed that he might be able to take at least  
some of his wealth with him.*

*It so happened that an angel visited him in a dream and said,  
“I’m sorry, but you can’t take your riches with you.”*

*This fellow begged the angel to speak to the Lord about an exception to policy  
such that he might find a loophole in the code that governed such things.  
And he continued to pray that he could take his riches with him.*

*The angel reappeared one night and informed him that the Lord had decided  
to allow him to take one carry-on suitcase after all.*

*Overjoyed, the man took his largest suitcase and filled it  
with pure gold bars and placed it beside his bed.*

Willard, p. 2

*Soon afterward, he died and found himself standing before  
the Gates of Heaven where St. Peter was waiting at his desk.*

*St. Peter seeing the suitcase said,*

*"Hello, hello! What's this? You can't bring that in here!"*

*But, this fellow explained to St. Peter that he had permission  
and asked him to check out his story with the Lord.*

*Sure enough, St. Peter came back saying,*

*"Right! So, you're allowed one carry-on bag,*

*but I'm supposed to check its contents before letting you through.*

*Oh, and would you mind taking off your shoes? "*

*Then, St. Peter opened the suitcase to inspect the worldly items*

*that this fellow felt were too precious to leave behind and he said,*

*"You brought paving stones?"*

<http://www.makeitclearnow.org/re humor.html>

Because the streets of Heaven are paved... with... gold... Get it? Oh well...

The lesson from that joke-parable is that the resources we have from God  
are already sufficient to our needs.

The question is often about how we access them and  
communicate the need for them in the first place.

Our first scripture lesson today is a wonderful story about creativity  
and the potential that each of us has to make a difference.

The Hebrew people had escaped oppression in Egypt  
by venturing out into the desert wasteland of Sinai.

They had become a free people who pledged themselves to follow God  
and build a community together.

In the process, they wanted to establish a place of meeting with God;  
Just as Moses went up on a mountain top to commune with God,  
the people themselves needed a place to meet God, too.

They needed a sacred space that would be separate from the ordinary,  
yet accessible.

And of course it needed to have beauty, symbolism, grandeur, yet simple, too  
in keeping with the guidelines and taboos of their laws.

Willard, p.3

And it says in Exodus 35:21 that

*...they came, everyone whose heart was stirred,  
and everyone whose spirit was willing,  
and brought the Lord's offering to be used for the tent of meeting,  
and for all its service, and for the sacred vestments.*

Two artisans were appointed to oversee the design and construction of this tent of meeting and all the furnishings and apparel that would be required.

They were Bezalel and Oholiab and God had

*'filled them with skill to do every kind of work done by an artisan or by a designer or by an embroiderer in blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and in fine linen, or by a weaver—by any sort of artisan or skilled designer.'*

And these artisans had to ask Moses to tell the people to stop giving, because they already had what they needed, but the people still kept giving.

They brought all kinds of gold ornaments like

*'brooches and earrings and signet rings and pendants',  
'blue or purple or crimson yarn' and 'goats' hair'  
that could be spun into fabric along with 'fine linen'  
as well as 'tanned rams' skins', 'fine leather',  
'silver', 'bronze', and 'acacia wood'.*

They had to tell them,  
'Enough already!'

These were people in the desert! They were people who were in survival mode! And still they gave out of the resources of what they carried with them and their delight in being part of something important.

They discovered that – within themselves, they had-enough-already – they had what they needed already in their midst.

This is a lovely story!

The first time I heard it was when I was a seminarian at Lancaster Theological Seminary

during an orientation about the Parish Resource Center which was established in the old library there.

Their philosophy was to help the ministers, youth workers, and Christian educators who came to them for advice by asking questions.

Willard, p.4

In this way, the Resource Center consultants helped their clients  
by getting them to clarify what they wanted to accomplish and why  
rather than simply providing some ready-made program.  
They helped them see the resources they already had  
and come to their own conclusions about how to proceed  
before looking for a specific book or video.  
They had enough already – and just needed to realize it.

Asking a question to involve people in solving their own problems  
is a characteristic of many of the healing stories in the Gospels.  
Jesus would ask a question or make a statement that would  
provoke a response like:

“What do you want me to do for you?” “Do you want to be healed?”  
In this story from Matthew 14, Jesus prompted the disciples to find a way  
to feed a hungry crowd of more than 5,000 people  
when he said, “You give them something to eat.”

There are a couple ways of interpreting how this “miracle” happened:  
It could simply be the magnification or regeneration of bread and fish  
that the disciples brought out to feed this multitude of people  
and that they had enough to eat and be satisfied.  
That would bring to mind another story from Exodus  
how God provided manna – literally bread from heaven,  
that formed like dew on the ground  
that the people had to gather daily – because it couldn’t be stored.  
They could only prepare what was enough to eat that day –  
because more than that would just spoil.

Another interpretation of how the 5,000 were fed is that –  
as the basket of broken pieces of bread and fish went around,  
people shared what they brought with them.  
So that, as they took something out, they also put something back in.  
Either way works for me and perhaps both happened simultaneously  
though I’m inclined to think the better miracle was inspiring  
generosity in people and not something God alone did for them.

These connections with the story of the Exodus from the bondage of Egypt,  
is a reminder that this was not some aimless wandering in a wasteland.  
This was a time of preparation to become a viable community  
with traditions and laws and stories to guide them into their future –  
and what has become our reality.

Willard, p.5

Like those early children of Israel, The United Church of Christ at The Villages had its own desert time of preparation, going from oasis to oasis, perfecting its organization for worship and service.

Fay Driscoll would set up the altar table every Sunday morning wherever you gathered and Ray Peidl would run the AV presentation – and back then, it was just the lyrics for hymns.

Now there are new challenges as we have entered the “promised land” of 12514 County Road 101 to continue and expand upon the mission of this community of faith through our worship, our outreach, our fellowship, our “fun” raising, education, management, and stewardship of the resources that we already have and what we will surely need in the future. Make no mistake that one of those challenges will be in meeting the responsibility of our mortgage.

But we are here to do a special mission in this community.

We are here to show how there're as many ways of being a true Christian as there are people with willing hearts to serve.

We have an obligation to show forth God's love through Jesus Christ, open to all and affirming everyone regardless of race, creed, or gender.

And that no matter who they are or where they are on life's journey, they are welcome here – welcome in God's house.

It would be nice to say “Enough already!”

But in the meantime, let's put our faith forward and work together in the belief we already have what it takes, and we will surely find enough of what we will need to do what God is asking us to do, now and in the future.

Amen

Exodus 36:1-7

36 Bezalel and Oholiab and everyone skilful  
to whom the Lord has given skill and understanding  
to know how to do any work in the construction of the sanctuary  
shall work in accordance with all that the Lord has commanded.

2 Moses then called Bezalel and Oholiab and everyone skilful  
to whom the Lord had given skill,  
everyone whose heart was stirred to come to do the work;

3 and they received from Moses all the freewill-offerings  
that the Israelites had brought for doing the work on the sanctuary.  
They still kept bringing him freewill-offerings every morning,

4 so that all the artisans who were doing every sort of task  
on the sanctuary came, each from the task being performed,

5 and said to Moses,  
'The people are bringing much more than enough  
for doing the work that the Lord has commanded us to do.'

6 So Moses gave command, and word was proclaimed throughout the camp:  
'No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering  
for the sanctuary.'

So the people were restrained from bringing;

7 for what they had already brought was more than enough  
to do all the work.

Matthew 14:13-21

- 13 Now when Jesus heard this,  
    he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself.  
But when the crowds heard it,  
    they followed him on foot from the towns.
- 14 When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd;  
    and he had compassion for them and cured their sick.
- 15 When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said,  
    ‘This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late;  
    send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages  
    and buy food for themselves.’
- 16 Jesus said to them,  
    ‘They need not go away; you give them something to eat.’
- 17 They replied,  
    ‘We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.’
- 18 And he said,  
    ‘Bring them here to me.’
- 19 Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass.  
    Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven,  
    and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples,  
    and the disciples gave them to the crowds.
- 20 And all ate and were filled;  
    and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces,  
    twelve baskets full.
- 21 And those who ate were about five thousand men,  
    besides women and children.