

Exodus 36: 1-7 “Enough & More Than Enough” Rev. Janet Chapman 11/8/20

Each of us have been struggling to find our new groove in the life of COVID these past 9 months. One of the new hobbies is caring for my 3 ducks, 2 females and 1 male. Spending time with them morning and night, I have learned their personalities and particularities. The male is the aggressor, the smaller female is the water lover and food hog, and the larger female politely waits for the others, avoids the water (didn't even know ducks did that), and cocks her head with curiosity whenever you talk to her. The smaller female lays an egg a day without fail while the larger one takes a break every few days. What this means, however, is that my refrigerator is overflowing with duck eggs so please let me know if you want some – I offer them with much joy as a gift to you, the community of faith. Offering our gifts is what this month is all about in our church life. Tomorrow starts all the prep work for our annual Holiday Boutique which will be held this Saturday at church. We officially received permission from the Shasta County Public Health Dept on Friday to operate as a “swap meet” or “destination shopping center” utilizing the corresponding health guidelines which accompany that status (as I outlined earlier). That means that the Gails and Lindas, the Jims and Oles, the Marys and Marcis of our congregation will be bringing their offerings to be shared for next Saturday, all those skilled artisans and bakers, those with the skills and knowhows for making everything involved in this stupendous event happen, will be bringing their offerings. My gift will be “hall monitor,” or “mask monitor,” and for those who refuse to abide, I have lots of eggs, just kidding... or am I?

Our scripture this morning offers a few names of skilled artisans that help build the temporary sanctuary of God's people while they were on a long and arduous journey through the wilderness. Their names were Bezalel and Oholiab, or something like that. In respect to

(Kathleen), we made their names a bit simpler in the reading of the text, but the point of the matter is that these were gifted individuals who offered themselves to do God's work. Bezalel was the construction foreman who was an expert craftsman in wood, metal, and precious stones as well as architect and engineer. Oholiab was his building assistant and designer. Together they took all the building materials this ragtag group of Israelites brought morning after morning until finally Moses said, "The people are bringing more than enough for doing this work that God has commanded us to do... enough and more than enough." So he sent out orders through the camp, "Men! Women! No more offerings for the building of the sanctuary. We now have enough." What amazing and miraculous words – there is enough and more than enough.

By some miracle, this congregation experienced such giving when similar folks helped build this sanctuary, plus the building next door, with their own hands. A little over 35 years ago, this congregation was just a traveling band of pilgrims without a sanctuary to call their own. You were seeking God's promised land from which your ministry could grow and flourish. You found yourselves setting up a Dwelling for God's people in local homes, then to a room in a nearby church who ultimately disapproved of the gender of your Shepherd, then you were off to a nearby funeral home where caskets with bodies had to be regularly moved out of the way in order to worship. I still remember visiting you when I was in college and assisting my dad to set up chairs for worship when you met at the local bank. You continued to journey on, holding on to God's call to give more than enough in order to establish a corner in this community, a Dwelling, where people might transition from the enslaved to the free, the downtrodden to the uplifted, the broken to the healed. Just in our last couple years, this Dwelling provided relief

and comfort to our neighbors in the wake of the Carr fire, it offered a place to stay for fire recovery volunteers, it opened its doors to children of first responders to have a place to go while their parents spent hours on end working on the front lines of trauma, it provided food to the hungry and support to agencies sheltering those without homes. By doing so, you continued building the Dwelling by which God could be experienced. We are a picture of a human community struggling to live in right relationship with God, with neighbor, and with self. Sometimes we have succeeded and other times we have not.

Our story has a lot in common with the Israelites' story, probably because both are stories of humanity. Both remind us, as Brian McLaren notes, that the road to freedom doesn't follow a straight line from point A to point B. Instead, it zigzags and backtracks through a discomfort zone of lack, delay, distress, and strain. In those wild places, character is formed – the personal and social character needed for people to enjoy freedom and aliveness. Like those who have walked before us, we need to know that grumbling and complaining can be more dangerous than poisonous snakes or the hot desert sun. Like them, we must be forewarned about the danger of catastrophizing the present or romanticizing the past. Like them, we must remember that going forward may be difficult, but going back is disastrous. In the story of the Exodus with its 10 plagues, we might say that God got the people out of slavery but with the 10 commandments which Moses brought down from the mountain, God got the slavery of the people. God gave the people inner nourishment in those commands, along with daily manna, that would become the moral basis for their lives in freedom. Then God gave them a set of practices – rituals, holidays, and so on, to help them develop and deepen the character of free people. One of those practices was setting aside a special holy place. They started with a “tent

of meeting” that ultimately became replaced with a more permanent elaborate gathering place called the Tabernacle. That holy space in the center of their encampment reminded them that the God of liberation was journeying with them – not just above them as visualized with a cloud of smoke and fire, but among them, walking with them in the desert dust as they made the road to freedom.

One of the struggles of the Exodus story is our tendency to remember only the negative, only the instances of bad behavior. As the story of 2020 is remembered, I wonder if we will see the same as history books print the horrors instead of the moments of goodness, justice, and love which have triumphed. Just like in reading Exodus, people will be quick to point out the awful examples of humanity, yet that is neither a fair judgment nor an accurate one. Today’s story should be told more frequently because it shows the incredible faith and generosity of the Israelites in the wilderness. The problem is the story doesn’t appear in the Lectionary, so for those of us who tend to center our texts around that 3 year cycle, we never encounter it. Instead, we only hear the story of the golden calf which perpetuates the picture of a rebellious and stubborn people. We don’t get to hear Moses’ words, “You have given enough, more than enough!” That certainly isn’t words most pastors will ever say to their flock – there always seems to be some need somewhere. But I heard these words a few weeks after the Camp and Carr Fires roared through and mounds of donated clothes ended up in parking lots for survivors; I heard it again while in Springfield after the Holiday fire and the local high school was inundated with clothes. We learned what Week of Compassion and others have been trying to teach us – people are inherently good and desire to share of what they have with others, but sometimes aren’t sure how or where. The larger church body provides the guidance and

resources to put our gifts to the best use. Unlike a wandering group of freed slaves, we have a resource to lean upon to utilize the surplus of giving which God inspires within us. Against all odds, walking by faith, we will survive and more than that: we will learn what it means to be alive.

Perhaps a lesson from our text is that people do not have to be guilted into giving or expected to give until it hurts. Rather the call to offering is one of giving what you can, your time, talent or material goods, knowing that everyone's ability to give will be different, but every gift will be equally valuable. We have been given a story based on abundance rather than scarcity, and it turns out that it is easier to get people out of slavery than to get slavery out of people. So let's walk the road of faith with joy and confidence, embracing the freedom God so graciously provides, and trusting in the Holy Spirit to lead us always towards the common good.