

September 20, 2026 — Sermon

Scripture Reading: Exodus 16:11–15

Gospel Reading: Matthew 20:1–16

“The Miracle We Miss”

We live busy lives. We have places to go, things to do, and responsibilities to take care of. And sometimes, in the middle of all that busyness, we miss what matters most. We forget the simple fact that we are here, right now, breathing and living. We forget how precious it is to have people beside us—people we love, people who care about us, and people who share our lives. Being busy can make us feel productive. It can even make us feel that we are living well. But being productive is not the same as living fully. Sometimes, we need to stop. We need to look around and ask ourselves, “Have I been missing something important?” And when we do, we may discover the miracles that have been right in front of us all along.

Perhaps this is one reason we gather for worship every week. We step away from our routines. We pause. We turn our attention to God. And we remember that life is more than what we accomplish. Life itself is a gift. Sometimes, the miracle is not something extraordinary that suddenly happens. It is something ordinary that we have stopped noticing. And that brings us to today’s reading from Exodus.

God has brought the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, and now they are in the wilderness. But before long, they begin complaining. Why? Because they do not have enough food. Their fear is real. They have escaped slavery, but they do not know how they will survive in the wilderness.

When my wife and I were about to move to Wisconsin, we were worried about where we could find Korean ingredients. Some of you have kindly asked us what we eat and shared places where we could find Korean food. We have also tried Wisconsin cheese and brats, and we love them! Of course, finding Korean ingredients is nothing compared with facing hunger in the wilderness. But your kindness has reminded me how important food is and how meaningful it is when someone cares about our daily needs.

When I heard this story as a child, I thought the Israelites were simply faithless people. But as I have grown older, I have started to understand them a little better. They were hungry. They were afraid. They were asking, “Will we have anything to eat tomorrow?” And God hears their cries. That evening, quail covered the camp. In

the morning, when the dew lifts, something unfamiliar appears on the ground. The people look at it and ask, "What is it?" That question is connected with the name manna. Moses tells them, "It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat."

Think about that moment. They are looking at God's provision, but they do not recognize it. They are standing in the middle of a miracle, asking, "What is it?" Perhaps we do something similar. We wake up every morning. We breathe. We walk. We eat our meals. We see the faces of people we love. Walking on water would certainly be a miracle. But what about walking on the ground? For someone who has struggled to walk, taking even a few steps can be an extraordinary gift. We celebrate when someone who could not see receives sight. And rightly so. But what about the gift of seeing someone we love? Seeing their face across the breakfast table? Looking into their eyes and having a conversation?

Sometimes, the miracle is not that something extraordinary happens. Sometimes, the miracle is that something ordinary happens again. The problem is that when a gift becomes familiar, we can stop recognizing it as a gift. And slowly, we miss the miracle. Recognizing this is an important part of our spirituality. So perhaps we should pray like this: "God, give us the spiritual sensitivity to recognize the gifts we have stopped seeing."

But the story of manna does not end here. A little later in Exodus 16, God tells the Israelites to gather manna according to the needs of their households. Some gather more, and some gather less. But when they measured what they had gathered, Scripture says those who gathered much had nothing left over, and those who gathered little had no shortage. Everyone had enough. The Bible does not explain exactly how this happened. But the story invites us to imagine a community where people share what they have so that no one is left without enough. And there was neither a shortage nor anything left over.

This is the kind of miracle we can participate in through sharing. When we share our portion with people around us, we offer more than food. We offer care. We offer friendship. We remind someone that they are not forgotten. The miracle is not simply that bread appears in the wilderness. The miracle is that everyone has enough. The manna story teaches us to recognize what we have received as a gift and to care about whether others have enough.

And that leads us to today's Gospel. Jesus tells a story about a landowner who goes out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. He agrees to pay them a denarius, a customary daily wage. We talked about the denarius last week, so you may remember it. Then he goes out again, at nine o'clock, at noon, at three o'clock, and finally at five o'clock, when the working day is almost over. He finds people still standing there. He asks, "Why are you standing here all day doing nothing?" At

first, we might assume that they are lazy. But listen to their answer. "Because no one has hired us."

Scripture does not tell us why no one hired them. Perhaps they were passed over for some reason. Perhaps they had been waiting desperately for an opportunity. But imagine how they might have felt. What if they had families waiting at home? What if they had spent the whole day wondering how they would put food on the table? By five o'clock, they had almost run out of time. But the landowner finds them and gives them work.

Then, when the time comes to pay the workers, something strange happens. The landowner tells his manager to begin with the workers who arrived last. He gives one denarius to the workers who came at five o'clock. He gives them a full day's wage. Then he gives the same amount to those who came at three, at noon, at nine, and even at six in the morning. The workers who arrived first are upset. They worked through the heat of the day, but they received the same wage as those who worked for only one hour.

At first, it seems very strange. But look at what actually happened. The landowner kept his promise to the first workers. They received exactly what they had agreed upon. They did not lose anything. What changed? They saw what someone else received. And suddenly, what had been enough no longer felt like enough. Comparison turned their satisfaction into resentment. The landowner asks them, "Are you envious because I am generous?"

Now, let me ask you another question. Who paid the additional cost of this generosity? The landowner did. He did not take money away from the first workers to give it to the last. He kept his promise to the first workers, and he chose to be generous to those who had been left waiting. Think about the last workers for a moment. They had waited all day. No one had hired them. But now, they could go home with a day's wage. They could bring something home. They were not forgotten. And yet, the first workers could not celebrate this miracle. They were too busy comparing.

Jesus begins this parable by saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like..." So what does life look like in God's kingdom? Perhaps it is a life where people are not valued only by how much they produce. A life where those who have been passed over are still seen. A life where we can rejoice when someone else receives what they need. A life where no one is forgotten. This brings us back to the wilderness.

In Exodus, God provides bread, and no one has a shortage. In Matthew, the landowner gives a day's wage even to those who were hired last. Both stories invite us to ask a different question. Not simply, "How much do I deserve?" But, "Does

everyone have enough?" We often miss the miracles in our lives because we take our own gifts for granted. And sometimes, we miss another miracle because we are too busy comparing ourselves with others. We forget that what we have is grace.

The miracle we miss is not only that God provides bread in the wilderness. It is that God provides enough. The miracle we miss is not only that the landowner pays his workers. It is that even those who were left waiting are not forgotten. May we recognize the gifts we have received, rejoice when others receive enough, and share what we have so that no one is forgotten. May God open our eyes to the miracles we have been missing. Amen.

Let us pray. God, open our eyes. Help us recognize the gifts we have stopped seeing. Help us notice the people we have overlooked. Free us from the comparison that steals our gratitude. And give us generous hearts, so that we may rejoice when your grace reaches others. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.