

Sermon for Sunday, September 21, 2014 Exodus 16:2-15, Matthew 20:1-16 "You Get What You Need"

This week a nice young man rang my doorbell, advertising a food delivery service called Relay Foods. You go online and list what you want, and they deliver it. Saves you a trip to the supermarket, offers foods from local farms and such. A nice service, with a reasonable fee for those who want to use it. It's not a new business model – if you're in northern Virginia, there's a similar service called Peapod, through the Giant supermarket chain. And it's not just in the USA - there's a supermarket chain in England called Tesco, sort of like Krogers. They've also got this kind of service – you can order online what you want, and they will deliver it. And if they don't have something you have asked for on your order, they'll substitute the closest possible item available. So instead of Edy's Cookie Dough Ice Cream, you might get Breyer's. Tolerable, right?

Well, a story broke recently about a Tesco delivery gone wrong. A man placed his order, including a loaf of walnut bread, just the perfect thing for afternoon tea. Well, Tesco was out of walnut bread. What did they substitute? A whole octopus.

Now, I can't come up with a reasonable explanation of why they thought the octopus was a good substitute, and when the company took a second look, they were embarrassed and gave the customer a refund and a gift card.

He wanted a loaf of walnut bread. He didn't get what he wanted. Somehow, somebody thought that although he *wanted* walnut bread, he really *needed* an octopus – who knew?

Thank goodness God does a better job than Tesco, in sorting out our wants and giving us what we really need!

But the thing we need to wrestle with is this: we don't always get what we want. We get what we need...sounds like an old Rolling Stones song, doesn't it?

You can't always get what you want, but if you try sometimes, you get what you need.

What do we want? Love, family, stability, meaningful work, health, you can add whatever comes to mind to the list.

But we don't always get that. Sometimes the ones that we love don't love us back, or even are hurtful – witness the roundhouse punch that Ray Rice gave his fiancée in that elevator. Sometimes we want family, but are estranged from them because of past hurts. Sometimes we can't get the work that we would like to do, and have to work in something that feels like hard, slow, boring torture to keep a roof over our heads and food on the table. Sometimes our bodies or our minds fail us – we become ill. And sometimes these illnesses cannot be cured.

We don't always get what we want.

But somehow, we get what we need. A wise friend might help a woman who is being mistreated to leave, or might help the abuser to see how wrong this behavior is. We might create a new family of friends who love and support us, if our own biological family must be kept at a distance. A job that keeps us solvent might be a way-station to something better, or we might learn something about the work that surprises us and gives us pleasure. Our bodies might be imperfect or broken, but we can find comfort in the care of family, the ministrations of good doctors and nurses, the safety of residing in a community designed to support us in our infirmity.

There might be moments of joy even when we think we have not gotten what we wanted.

For me almost twenty years ago, as a divorced mom, I thought my life was in a deep hole from which I could never resurface. Love had betrayed me. I was in financial distress. I had to find another job, and there were none to be found. My children were worried, I was terrified, and there seemed to be no answer to my prayers.

Until there was.

A friend helped me find a job. Not a local job, to be sure, but a job that would pay me well enough to take care of my children. Another friend let me stay with his family until I could get a place of my own. I slowly started to trust that things would get better. And after a while, after swearing that I would never trust another man again, I found the most loving and trustworthy and smart and cute guy in the world and fell in love again.

What I had wanted was for my former husband to realize the error of his ways and work to stay married and stable. What I had wanted was not to get divorced. What I had wanted was to continue working with him in the company we had started.

I didn't get what I wanted. I got what God knew I needed.

God does that.

Think of the story of Moses. Moses has led the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt, and now they are headed to the new place that God has prepared for them. It is a long journey. They are walking in the desert and cannot find enough food and water. They are complaining about it, understandably.

And what do the Israelites tell Moses they want? "We wish were back in Egypt where there was lots of food." But God has another idea: the food will be delivered to them on the spot. Sort of like RelayFoods in the desert. First bread, and then when it becomes clear that they need something more than bread, then quails. God delivers, not necessarily what they want, but what they need, bread and meat to strengthen them for the continued journey.

They got what they needed.

So too the parable we've heard in the Gospel today. There's a vineyard owner, and he wants to hire day laborers to work in the vineyard. He hires some of them first thing in the morning, after agreeing to the usual daily wage. Those workers are happy – they've got a day's work and a fair wage for the day. At midday, the owner realizes that he will need more helpers, so he hires on some more workers. He tells them he will pay them the normal daily wage. These noontime workers are happy – they'll work the whole afternoon and early evening and be paid as if they were working all day. In the late afternoon, the work is almost done, but the all-day workers are tired and slowing down, and he didn't hire a whole bunch of the noontime guys, so he goes and hires a few more workers to finish up the job. He says "I'll pay you the daily wage if you come now and help us finish up."

It's a sweet deal for those last hired, right? A full day's pay for a few hours work. And the ones who were hired in the morning get a little ticked off, and say "that's not fair!" You could wonder if they wanted more money themselves, or less for the ones who were hired later, because that makes economic sense to them. But they had agreed to a fair wage for their day's labor. Do they want more money? Yes. Do they need more money? Not really – they were originally happy with the agreed upon wage.

They didn't get what they wanted. They got what they needed.

But wants and needs are not just stories from ancient times.

What do you want? You may want me to stay as your rector. I love you for loving me and thinking I do an okay job as your rector, but God wants me to go to my new position at Mayo House.

So if you can't get what you want, what do you need?

Someone to help you get through the first few weeks of my departure, as you remember that you are capable of doing much of the work of this parish as laypersons.

Someone to help you discern and dream about where God is leading you next, because this is an ever-changing community, and who and where you are now is different than it was just five years ago.

Someone to be your next rector, who will take you the next steps in your journey...places that I could not be able to take you.

It's alright to be worried about whether your needs are going to be met – know that God will meet those needs.

Your wants? Not so much. Some may happen, some may not. But no matter what, trust that the Lord will always, always supply your needs. Amen.