

Fourth Sunday of Easter 2018 (22.04.18)

Exodus 16: 4 – 15; Revelations 2: 12 – 17

In my extensive and scholarly research for this sermon I've been googling examples of translation fails. Unfortunately, whilst I've found many examples that are hilarious, most were frankly too rude to be repeated from the pulpit. One of the milder ones was "Hele soup smell of urine"; and one that was perhaps merely saucy rather than rude was the sign to discourage people from interfering with a machine that said "Please don't touch yourself: let us help you to try out." Then there was the frankly baffling sign in a hotel that said "We have good rooms, and very cheap, have three human lives and have four human lives, have many human lives."

Well, I hope all this has served to prepare you and get you in the right frame of mind to appreciate more fully the side splitting joke in the final verse of this evening's Old Testament lesson: "When the Israelites

saw it, they said to one another" – wait for it – "What is it?" Get it? That's what they said when they saw the manna from heaven! They said "What is it?" No? Well, if you don't get it it's probably because what you're not appreciating is that the Hebrew word used for "what" is not the usual word used for "what" but a rather more obscure Hebrew word: "Man." So the question is "Manhe?" and the answer is Manna! It's a pun worthy of Tim Sykes! But it gets a little bit lost in translation.

This whole principle of manna from heaven, in fact, gets lost in translation. Or at least, it gets lost in common usage. If we say of something that it was manna from heaven – and we often do say that in everyday speech – what we mean is that something's just perfect, exquisite, we couldn't ask for anything better. But the theological message of the story of manna from heaven is not luxury: it's sufficiency. Each day the Israelites got just enough for what they needed. If they needed two days' supply because the

following day was the Sabbath, the miracle was that they got supplied with two days' supply; but each other day there was miraculous provision of just enough to get through to the next day.

I've said it before from this pulpit, and I'll say it again because it's a phrase I like: the story of the people of Israel being saved from slavery in Egypt is the prototype of the story of salvation of which Jesus is the archetype. It follows the same pattern and foreshadows what God does for us through Jesus. And it had a real predominance for Black Theology as it was emerging because in some ways, to Black people in the southern States struggling to get Civil Rights, it was a more poignant expression of God's saving power than the story of Jesus. And it contains the same theological features; and among them is a Theology of Enough.

We find the archetype of a Theology of Enough in the words of Jesus himself. He taught that whenever we

pray – whenever: that's why it's the archetype – whenever we pray, ask our Father in heaven to give us today our daily bread. We don't pray "Give us today the winning lottery ticket." We ask to be given just enough for today: our daily rations. And it's as much a petition that we will have the spiritual insight and discipline to accept that enough is enough, as it is a plea that we not go hungry.

These Old Testament writings of the People of Israel being led out of slavery and settling in their own land are full of this Theology of Enough. They're told not to work themselves to the bone: give yourself a day off once a week: enough is enough. They're told not to harvest too efficiently: don't go right to the edge: leave a margin for others: enough is enough. And they're told when they're gathering in what they've harvested, don't be too efficient: don't worry about picking absolutely everything up: leave something for others to pick up: enough is enough.

The Revd Matthew Pollard, Rector of Bridlington Priory

When we're challenged by a Theology of Enough in our 21st lives, the most obvious challenge is to our excessive consumption; to the idolatry betrayed by the extent of our wardrobes, the choice of our cars and the size of the barns on modern farms; to our disregard for deforestation, the melting of the ice caps and unsustainable use of petro-chemicals. But a Theology of Enough turns on its head our understanding of what is efficient and what isn't efficient. God's efficiency is different to our efficiency.

The people who met in the Priory's Lent Groups this year watched a film that showed a group of aging hippies in Todmorden claiming that the sort of big agri-business we see out on the Yorkshire Wolds inland from Brid is not efficient; and that somehow the labour-intensive sort of Richard Briers and Felicity Kendall type Good Life of self-sufficiency they eek out of a patch of hillside in the Calder Valley is more efficient. The Barley Barons of the Wolds would laugh their socks off at their naivety. They simply couldn't

afford to run a business on the principles of the small holdings of Tod. It simply wouldn't be efficient for them. And of course the point is that we're dealing here with two contradictory concepts of efficiency. The big agri-business of the Wolds is efficient at generating profits: it's economically efficient. The alternative model from Todmorden is efficient at maximising the amount of food that can be got out of a hectare of land, with complete disregard for whether it's economically efficient or not.

The Barley Barons would laugh at God's efficiency as well. They don't just harvest up to the edge of the fields: they obliterate the edges of the fields' take out all the hedges and boundaries so they can just go on harvesting uninterruptedly for acres and acres and acres. And yet it's by the Barley Baron's idea of efficiency that our lives are ruled. If we were confronted by God's efficiency we'd ask "What is it?" And the last laugh would be on us.
Amen.