

Year B, August 5, 2018
11 Pentecost (Proper 13)
Christ Church, Mexia

"In his book *Maverick*, Ricardo Semler tells of a lesson he learned working at Semco:

We were in yet another meeting... when we came to the purchase of \$50,000 worth of filing cabinets. Several departments had been waiting months for the cabinets and in desperation had decided to pool requests...

We didn't buy a single new file cabinet that day. Instead, we decided to stop the company for half a day and hold the First Biannual Semco File Inspection and Clean-out...

Our instructions were simple: We told everyone to look inside every file folder and purge every nonessential piece of paper...

I was one of Semco's biggest file hogs, with four large cabinets and a request for two more. After our cleanup, I trimmed down to a single cabinet, and that was pretty much how it went throughout the company... The cleanup went so well that when everyone had finished, Semco auctioned off dozens of unneeded file cabinets.

Sometimes what we think we need isn't what we really need."

To most men of his time King David would have seemed to be a person who had more than enough – of everything. He had been anointed by Samuel at the Lord's command to eventually become King of Israel. He had a fine house, many wives, riches, success in battles and all things. But he wanted the wife of another. And when they had committed adultery and she became pregnant, and her unknowing husband refused to sleep with her so it would appear to be his child, David had to have him killed so he could marry her and keep the affair secret. A person chosen by God, a servant of God, an otherwise righteous man with so many blessings. But he wanted what he didn't need.

Are we there yet? Can we stop – I'm hungry - I'm thirsty – it's hot! How much longer? Do you remember such trips as a child, or when

you had children? And we know that there is a lot of similarity with the Israelites on the Exodus. Why did you bring us out here to starve and die? Sure, we were slaves in Egypt, but at least we had food and a roof over our heads.

And God feeds them with Manna. It comes during the night, can be collected in the morning, enough for everyone. But you can't hoard it; it rots if you try to keep it overnight – except for that Manna collected the day the Sabbath begins. Because they are not supposed to labor on the Sabbath, so that Manna remains good overnight and is available to eat during the Sabbath. Trust in God – God supplies what is needed. Be obedient to God's will and there is no problem. Be content. But they were rarely content. They almost always wanted something they didn't have – didn't need.

In the gospel reading today, the people, the 5,000 whom Jesus had fed, follow him to Capernaum. But Jesus asks them: are you following me because I fed you with food or are you here for another reason? Do you love God, do you want eternal life with God? Did you come for the Word of God? Remember they wanted to make him their earthly King – to take care of their problems and liberate them from the Romans. Was that what they needed?

In 19th century China many people came to the Christian churches established by missionaries. They were baptized and joined the church, because they were hungry, and they could get food at church. They remained loyal members as long as the congregation was able to meet their physical needs. For this reason, they were often referred to as "rice Christians." Because when their prospects improved, and they no longer needed to depend on the church, they drifted away – their physical needs being supplied through other means.

In East Germany and Romania, just before the fall of the Soviet empire, when the religious leaders were speaking out against communism and manifesting courage, many people flocked to the churches. Patriotism brought them there. But when freedom was secured, they drifted away from church and the numbers dwindled to near what they had been before.

We saw something similar here in our own country. After 9-11, the churches became filled with those trying to re-establish a feeling of security. And when fear abated, and life returned to "normal," so to speak, so did attendance. Thus, it seems to have been throughout history.

And so, we might ask today, as Jesus might, why are we here? Why are we here? Hopefully, it is because we understand that Jesus Christ is the bread of life. And, if we believe that, we will never hunger or thirst; we will have all that we need. Can it be all that we want as well?

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word and the Spirit.

Amen.