

Exodus 2:16:2-16-15  
September 20, 2020

Manna

I have been taking walks at night after the sun goes down so that I can look at the moon and the stars and the planets, mostly Mars and Jupiter. People have been looking at that sky for thousands of years. I take some comfort from knowing that the heavens haven't changed their courses, because so much down here on earth is out of sorts.

I am confronted by the reality that for all the world's trouble I feel completely safe out at night, at least in my neighborhood, which is not true everywhere. It is peaceful where I am. Perhaps that is the funniest of all feelings, that as crazy as things are in the world, I find my space peaceful, so it is not so much the chaos that threatens me, as the anxiety about the possibility of chaos. Yet I confess, I feel threatened.

The fires in the west and the storms in the Gulf, the pandemic everywhere and the economic implications and the election, and we must acknowledge the weight of the losses we have felt here in our own community, which add to the stress; the world is taking a beating and the temptation is to throw in the towel. Except that we can't . . .

There were hard times in Egypt over 3,000 years ago, and the stories about that experience and what it meant for the Israelites have helped countless millions through troubled times ever since. The Israelites themselves told the story of the Exodus over and over

when the Assyrians came, and later the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans; it seems that being conquered and exiled and in captivity was always a threat and often a reality, and the story of deliverance from Egypt has always been around to help the people through, and to challenge them.

And since the Christian faith has been around, the story of the Exodus has been there to speak of deliverance available in times of threat. The lessons are about God's provision and obedience. These are the lessons of the day.

Manna

As soon as the people of Israel came out of the experience at the sea, they began to complain. Actually their complaints were not unfounded. Out there in the wilderness, there was not enough food and water to go around. For all their trouble in Egypt, they had always eaten well. The anxiety they faced about starvation and thirst attacked their faith and they began to complain to Moses that even the miracle at the sea would not save them from the journey in the desert if provisions were not made. Moses had not planned how to feed the people in the wilderness. So they grumbled and panned away for the good ole days in captivity.

God, of course, heard their grumbling. It is very interesting the kind of relationship God and Israel had, God always providing, but only *in the moment*, never permanently; and Israel always amazed at the

miraculous provision until the next crisis and then they acted as if nothing had happened and failed to trust. Then they complained and God provided and around and around they went. You know, this is not the story of Israel alone. It is the story of the human race, which makes it our story too.

I am struck by the way the manna wasn't only provision but also a test of obedience. When I was in the 7th grade, I was in a shop class. I think it was metals. The teacher gave us a quiz on the first day to see how much we knew, kind of a pre-test. The first instruction was to read all of the questions before answering any of them. The last instruction, as you may guess, was to not answer any of the questions, but to put your name at the top of the page and turn it in. Of course, we all failed because we ignored the first instruction and answered the questions as we went. When we got to the end it was too late. The moral of the story: follow instructions.

At this point, the main instruction was to gather only enough manna for the day. The trick to the manna is that it came everyday and only provided enough food *for the day*. When some of the people decided to stock up, which is, of course, the American way too; always make sure one has enough in case of an emergency, or in case guests arrive, or if there is a crisis and the trucks don't make it through; it turns out that the manna went bad during the night. It turns out that the bread was not only provision, it was a test to see if people would obey instructions.

Later they were to be given some other instructions, you know them well:

Have no other gods before God and don't make idols  
Don't profane God's name and remember the Sabbath  
Honor your parents  
Don't kill and don't commit adultery  
Don't steal and don't lie about your neighbors,  
Don't covet.

Our anxiety tempts us to panic, to be selfish, to be suspicious of others whose humanity we doubt. We have also been given some instructions, not so much for the present crisis, but for the human journey. They are further clarifications, they serve us well in the present situation:

Think about your neighbor, not only those nearby  
Don't give in to hate, outdo one another in love and goodness  
Forgive, and allow yourself to be forgiven  
Be patient and thankful  
Have faith

The lesson of the manna is to follow instructions and trust God fully for daily provision and eternal care, come what may. That is both the source of our security and the test of our obedience. I am sure that by God's grace, we will pass. When you go home to eat your lunch, think about this, it is the food that the Lord has given you to eat. There will be no throwing in of the towel around here. Amen.

## Exodus 16:2-15

2 In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. 3 The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the Lord’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.”

4 Then the Lord said to Moses, “I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. 5 On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days.”

6 So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “In the evening you will know that it was the Lord who brought you out of Egypt, 7 and in the morning you will see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?” 8 Moses also said, “You will know that it was the Lord when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the Lord.”

9 Then Moses told Aaron, “Say to the entire Israelite community, ‘Come before the Lord, for he has heard your grumbling.’”

10 While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the Lord appearing in the cloud.

11 The Lord said to Moses, 12 “I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, ‘At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God.’”

13 That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. 14 When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor.

15 When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, “It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat.

Welcome, some preliminaries.

Thank you for coming. Thank you for observing the suggested protocols, the distancing and the masks and the not standing or singing. The service is meant to be close to our normal order except a few things, we will have music, but not sing, although no one will say anything if you are singing under your mask. There will be 3 verses played for each hymn. We will have the Gloria Patri and Offertory and Doxology, though not passing the plate for now. Please be patient as we get used to the new situation, some things may change over time as we get used to things.

I will be outside to greet you after the service as long as the weather is good.

Again, welcome, thanks for coming, God bless you all. Dave, come and lead us in the Call to Worship.

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