

“Bread and Quails”  
Stouffville United Church  
Sunday, September 24, 2017

Exodus 16

“The whole congregation of the Israelites set out from Elim; and Israel came to the wilderness of Sin (which is a shortened form of Sinai in case you wondering) on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt.” Looks like they’ve been walking for six weeks since the Red Sea crossing. And they are hungry. There is nothing to eat. And the whole congregation complains.

Some translations read complain as ‘murmur’. The people murmured against Aaron and they murmured against Moses and they murmured against God. They said, “If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread.” These fleshpots were what fed the Israelites when they were slave laborers in Egypt. They want to go back to what they have known, back to what was familiar.

But in gaining their freedom, the old way in Egypt had ended for the people of Israel. The familiar food – big pots of meat are no more, and the familiar ways of cooking are gone. Gone is the familiar landscape and plants to grow. Everything has changed. They don’t even know where to find the food they need in this wilderness. And they haven’t even arrived at the destination of their new beginning. They are in between.

And we know that God will hear their complaint and God will ‘rain down bread’, but with a caveat – there will be enough for everyone on each day. Do not hoard. “Gather as much of it as each of you needs, an omer to a person according to the number of persons, all providing for those in their own tents. The Israelites did so, some gathering more, some less. But when they measured it with an omer, those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed.” An omer is about 9 cups.

They were gathering manna. The word ‘manna’ means ‘What is it?’ “It was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey.” They had never seen such food before. Morning by morning they gathered it, but when the sun grew hot it melted.

Numbers 11:8 tells us that ‘the people went around and gathered it, ground it in mills or beat it in mortars, then boiled it in pots and made cakes of it; and the taste of it was like the taste of cakes baked with oil. Exodus 16:35 tells us the Israelites would eat this manna for 40 years until they come to the border of the land of Canaan.

The book of Numbers also chronicles the complaining of the Israelites in the wilderness. Numbers 11:5: We remember the fish we used to eat in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our strength is dried up and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at.

The problem in this passage is not that the people murmur. The problem is that they do not trust.

When I go to the Festival of Homiletics in the United States, there is a flagship bluegrass band that performs with the memorable name, The Fleshpots of Egypt. Rolf Jacobson is the lead singer and is also the Associate Professor Old Testament at Luther Seminary in Minneapolis-St. Paul's. The Fleshpots of Egypt do a super beer and hymns every Festival where all songs are sung in the keys of G and D.

Rolf named his band Fleshpots of Egypt, first because it was funny but more because it was a commentary on human nature that we are by nature weak of faith, quick to complain and we turn on our leaders fast, as soon as things go bad. As soon as we escaped we all complained against our leaders multiple times and even we had the manna we said ah I'm so sick of this manna. God sticks with us and is faithful with us and provides out of God's abundance this substance called manna.<sup>1</sup>

In our lives, we too have found ourselves in a new place – a place of endings of familiar patterns of support. And like the people of Israel we simply have no idea how things will look. We are in between. How can we find nourishment and sustenance in this new place of in between.

Where are those gifts and blessings God has sent that we don't immediately recognize? Where is God raining "bread from heaven" in your life and in the life of your family or Stouffville United Church or the community of Stouffville so that we might find our way in the wilderness, from a past that we've left behind, to a new day of new life?

From the textweek.com website, came this thought about what we consider extraordinary, and miss out on what is happening in the ordinary. "When we limit God's involvement with us to what's miraculous, we look for God's care in only what we think of as extraordinary. Then we ignore God's provision in the gifts of each new day, the food we grow or buy, and the health we enjoy. We no longer see God as caring so deeply about us that God provides even the most mundane things that sustain us. As a result when we can no longer recognize the miraculous, we assume God is simply uninterested at best, and completely absent at worst.

In a real sense, western citizens of the 21<sup>st</sup> century no longer ask, with the Israelites, "What is it?" about our daily bread. Yet when we claim, "It's (just) lunch," we also reveal our own ignorance about that bread. It is, after all, nothing less than 'the bread *the Lord* has given you to eat'."<sup>2</sup>

God provides the gift of manna to each Israelite. And even if one person gathered more and one gathered less, when it was measured with the omer, each person received the same amount. There is enough for all. There is a levelling in the feeding. We all get the same. There is no question of *you* deserved more or *you* deserved less. God gives to each the same gift.

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<sup>1</sup> Workingpreacher.com Brainwave podcast for September 24, 2017

<sup>2</sup> [www.textweek.com](http://www.textweek.com), Exodus 16:2-15

We all prayed these words today: “Give us this day our daily bread.” God said to Moses, each day the people shall go and gather enough for that day. Give us what is sufficient for this day. And in the measuring out of this daily allowance of grace, we can begin to trust in the daily gift of manna that will be enough for this day.

It isn't just miracles that display the depths of God's love. It's also things like Cheerios for breakfast, family members and friends that are gifts from God.

Daily manna. Our daily bread. Not more, not less, but what is needed for this day.

Thanks be to God. Amen.