

Sermon for Sunday, October 5, 2025

Exodus 16:1-18

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Today's Bible reading is likely familiar to many of you: the story of God's people receiving manna in the wilderness. The strength and wonder of Holy Scripture is that God uses it to speak to us in fresh ways every time we open up the book and ask, "What do you need to tell me today, Lord?" Today's sermon will consider two points.; first we consider the Israelites walking into the wilderness and ask whether we have ever walked in a personal wilderness. *(Pause)* Then we consider how God provided manna for the Israelites which leads us to recognize that God also provides manna to us.

The Israelites, God's people, had just been a part of an amazing miracle as God parted the waters of the Red Sea allowing the people to escape from the Egyptian army. They had lived, no, they had walked through a miracle. But now, roughly 45 days from this saving act they are in the wilderness. They are hungry and it's like they have completely forgotten what they experienced at the shores of the Red Sea. And so they whine and complain. Their words illustrate their desire to return to Egypt; to an enslavement so severe that that they begged God for help. How quickly they forgot; but lest we fall into judgment we must remember how quickly we forget!

Earlier this week I was reading a book called, *How We Learn to be Brave* by Marian Edgar Budde. One of the chapters in her book is titled, "Accepting what you do not choose...." This title speaks to the position of the Israelites in today's reading. Let me explain. The Israelites asked for freedom. They wanted to be rescued from their slavery. God responded to their pleas and they received their freedom. Yes, the Israelites asked for and received freedom. What they didn't choose was the route they would take to return to their ancestral homes in the promised land. That route included wilderness. Wilderness was viewed as a "god-forsaken" place; a place where God did not exist. There they were on the edge of the wilderness. They're frightened and hungry and the last thing they want is to enter into a "god-forsaken" place.

As the Israelites complain to Moses and Aaron these two leaders instruct them to turn toward the wilderness. In other words, they

have to face the uncharted; they have to face that which frightens them; they have to face their anxiety producing situation. Guess what? It is when they faced the wilderness that the "glory of the LORD appears in the cloud." It is only when the people turn to face the wilderness that they once again experience the presence of God. Without question God recognizes their fear, their anxiety, and their hunger but God insists that they face that which causes their fear and anxiety. God understands that the people need nourishment through God's presence and gracefully provides all that they need.

Have you ever found yourself frightened and hungry? Have you ever found yourself in a wilderness; in a situation that you did not choose, but that you must go through with? Think of the illnesses that you or a loved one have grappled with. Think of those who have struggled with infertility. Think of those that have lost their job through the vagaries of the economy. Think of those arrested without cause. Think of those desiring a secure future for their children and fleeing poverty. Think of the civilians in Gaza and Ukraine who have little to no hope for the future as they watch their country being destroyed. Each of these examples illustrate circumstances people did not choose.

Many are the times when it feels like we are in the wilderness and don't know where to go or which way to turn. But the amazing thing about God is that God is faithful to us. God hears, God recognizes the challenge and God gracefully provides the manna we need.

That's what happens in today's reading. God hears the laments of the Israelites. God recognizes their hunger and God provides them with bread. BUT, and this is important, the bread that the Israelites receive isn't loaves of bread falling out of the sky. It doesn't look like anything they might have imagined. In fact, when the Israelites see what later comes to be called "manna" they ask, "What's that?" (The word *manna* is a Hebrew word that literally means what is it or what is that?)

When God begins feeding the Israelites with manna they begin a long journey of total dependence on God. They receive only enough food for one day and have no choice but to totally depend on God. They must trust that God will provide again tomorrow. Day after day after day. We are told in another place that the Israelites wandered in the wilderness for 40 years: 40 years of depending that manna would be provided every day; no hoarding allowed. In the same way we pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." Just

enough for today. No hoarding allowed. We will concern ourselves with tomorrow's daily bread when tomorrow comes and trust that God will provide.

Manna: the bread of life for the Israelites. Manna, the bread that sustained them through the wilderness. Manna: in some mysterious way God was present in that fine flaky substance. My friends, today is a communion Sunday. We don't eat manna when we share in communion. We eat a bit of bread. But we believe that God is present in that bit of bread. We believe the words that are spoken, "This is the body of Christ, given for you." We believe that when we receive this bit of bread we are receiving Jesus. And as that bit of bread enters our bodies it is incorporated into our very being; into our cells. Jesus becomes a part of us; Jesus resides within us. Jesus our bread of life. Jesus the bread that sustains us through our wilderness experiences.

One of the points of holy communion is that God comes to us and becomes a part of us. God recognizes that humans need a tangible sense of God's presence in their life and Holy Communion is one way to provide that. Some say that frequent communion strengthens them for their journey through the wilderness—wherever they are on life's journey. As you well know, there are times when the wilderness is so thick, so tough, that we need all of the manna we can possibly swallow.

In conclusion, I encourage you to heed the words of God and face the wilderness. Don't be looking through rosy colored glasses toward the past. Keep your sights set on the future and step forward into that wilderness trusting that God will provide you with the manna that you need to continue on your journey. God hears, God recognizes your need and God will provide. Amen.