

August 15, 2021

DARING GREATLY ~ Moses Wilderness Wanderings

Exodus 16:1-15

Hunger. One of the great equalizers of humanity; no matter who you are, where you live, how much money you make, regardless if you are a newborn baby or a middle-aged woman—no matter your faith conviction or political leanings...we all get hungry. The stomach growls, energy levels become depleted and sustenance is needed. Food...one of the basic necessities of life...But problems can arise when there's not enough to go around.

Be it in lands that aren't producing crops, like today's story of the Israelites' trek through the wilderness or because you live in a household where there are too many mouths to feed off a very small paycheck. Did you know that in NJ alone almost 14% of all households in our state are food insecure & will struggle to find enough food this week. The coronavirus-related economic crisis is projected to push this number of food insecure people even higher by the end of the year. But as of right now 1 in 8 families in NJ are living day by day with not enough food on their plates to keep them healthy and well. Kids going to bed at night still hungry. This is happening around the world, our nation & right here in our neighborhood.

Hunger...we can all empathize with that need. We all know the importance of food and our dependence upon it for life...physically...emotionally and yes even spiritually. This is also why I think we can resonate so much w/today's passage from Exodus.

At this point in the Exodus story, God's people have been wandering in the wilderness now a little over 1 mos; not so far removed from their time of slavery in Egypt. Scholars estimate that "the whole congregation of the Israelites" could have been as high as 600,000 adults, children and livestock—all of whom had set out from Egypt with almost no provisions.

Today's story is part of the much larger account of the journey of the Israelites. Daring greatly, they followed Moses and the God miracle of a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night. They fled Egypt and made their way through the wilderness toward the promised Land of Canaan.

Today we hear that the people are hungry and they are NOT happy about it. Sure they've been freed from the oppressive slavery of Pharaoh...but **now** grumbling can be heard from the multitudes. They complain to Moses and Aaron their leaders about their traveling conditions...in fact, they even accuse them of trying to starve

them to death. The people of God say they long to be back in Egypt, even in slavery, where at least the food was plentiful.

Hunger...it gnaws at you, making you forget about some things...Like trusting in a God who parted a sea to carry you safely on dry ground from Pharaoh's armies. Or the horrible living conditions while in bondage to the Egyptians.

Our memory can become clouded even distorted when our bodies are stressed, Complaints can become dramatically exaggerated, when faced with an undesirable prospect. This overstatement of the situation the Israelites find themselves in, is clearly evident in verse 3 with the complaint "You (Moses and Aaron) have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

Now obviously, this is not the reason Moses and Aaron dared greatly and led the people out of Egypt, but the exaggeration points to the desperation the people are feeling...And they are feeling it...Physically, emotionally, mentally & spiritually. They are hungry and fear works within their hearts and minds. The response to their grumbling is immediate. The Lord says to Moses,

"I am going to rain bread from heaven for you and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day." (16:4a) And on top of that, I will cover the camp with quails every evening.

The Lord heard the complaints of the people and provided...provided for the basic necessity of daily food for their entire Exodus journey. This miraculous gift of food—manna and quail—once again proves God's trustworthiness and devotion to the survival of God's people. God's faithfulness cannot be doubted, so Moses reminded the people, saying But God isn't upset by your complaining and your doubt because God immediately, generously, graciously GIVES.

For me, today's passage is really a trust story...Do the people of Israel still trust God? Will they continue to dare greatly and trust that the Lord's got them, And will keep supporting them, providing for them, guiding them through all the wilderness wanderings they face?

*They HUNGER for many things amidst this time of change, transition, Exhaustion and fear...but also I think a time of hope and excitement for the journey they have only just begun.

Can't you just hear them asking, "Can we STILL dare greatly...and trust in our God?" **Boy I can REALLY relate to that...how about you?**

~Still amid a pandemic, in spite of God's presence and power leading us, empowering the leadership of First Church to pivot on a dime and go all virtual when in-person gatherings were suspended in 2020.

~In spite of the loss of membership, most small groups, fellowship opportunities and your former pastoral team...This church family continues to give of time, talent and treasure—Virtually and in-person to keep our church & our mission alive, & even thrive amidst an unprecedented time in the life of our church and our world.

~In spite of Spirit-breathed worship in both traditional and contemporary styles and strong preaching and teaching of God's Word each week

~In spite of taking a side-step this month with masking & plexiglass, dealing with the ongoing unknown of Delta & other variants of the coronavirus

****Can we continue to dare greatly and still trust in our God?**

Amidst our own hunger for "normalcy", health and safety, for mental and emotional harmony and balance, for our church to be able to just be together without fear or mandates or some form of distancing...We too HUNGER for many things amidst this time of change, transition, exhaustion & fear, but also a time of hope and excitement for the journey that's only just begun ...

Well today's story from Exodus helps us to answer this with a resounding YES!

God knows the importance of trust and faithfulness. God provides the miraculous gifts of manna and quail each day To satisfy their hunger...BUT God knows there's more to it than filling one's belly.

So God gives detailed instructions for the people to follow. As you heard in today's scripture readings, Manna is the ultimate perishable food. The Lord instructed the people were to gather only that which they each needed for one given day—no more, no less. (16:16-19). If they tried to save any overnight for the next day, it would become foul smelling and filled with worms. If they waited too long in the day to gather it, they found it would melt in the sun (16:20-21). So manna had a very short shelf life.

One had to strictly follow the instructions given on how to gather it. Since they could only gather it in the morning and eat it that day; it meant that every single day they **had** to rely on God. To trust that God would provide manna the next day and the next...and the next...No amount of pre-planning, or hoarding, or storage on their part would help. Only God's daily provision secured their lives. Talk about daring greatly!

Friends, this gift—to trust in God daily—was as important a “basic necessity” of life...as the food was to fill their bellies. The question is would the people **trust** God's faithfulness to them? God's generosity? Because if we can trust God to give us our daily bread...won't God provide us with everything else we might need to live our lives?

The joy of Psalm 34 reminds us, “O taste and see that the Lord is good.” This story reminds us that...God's goodness and love rains down from heaven to provide for all our basic necessities...our physical needs yes...and also our emotional needs and our spiritual needs. Its both/and...God cares for our whole being.

As we are taught in Dt 8:3 “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.” Words of instruction...of encouragement, of possibility and hope and of DEEP, abiding love.

*God was providing the people of Israel with food that filled their stomachs and food that filled their souls. The people of God were hungry and God provided daily for ALL their needs. Today's story (like any good story) invites us in, because we do know what it feels like to be hungry. Perhaps not in a life-threatening way like the Israelites...but hunger is something we know about...physically, emotionally & spiritually.

The questions we need to ask ourselves as the people of God here in this place and in this context is what do WE hunger after? What need do we have in life that is not being satisfied? What hunger is gnawing at us because we have nothing that satisfies our appetite?

- Do we hunger for relationships that are loving and healthy?
- Do we feel the emptiness in the pit of our stomach of God's presence?
- Do we crave purpose and meaning in our lives?

- Do we hunger for daily assurance that we have a God who really cares about us & will provide for our daily needs? Personally, with our family, our community?
- Do we ingest the Word of God (the Bible) daily...so that we can taste and see that the Lord is good?
- Do we hunger after this life together as the people of God uniquely called to grow, serve and love each other here at FUMC?

Friends, divine nourishment, food for the soul, comes to us in many different sources. The Word of God—the Bible, God’s instruction book on how to live, through prayer, meditation, worship, journaling, communion, fasting, baptism, service, outreach and tithing...to name a few.

This is why we offer hybrid, live streaming worship services and small groups for all ages. My friends, what basic needs do you have that we can help provide through the ministry of First Church?

~We want to know what the families of this church and of Moorestown and Mt. Laurel and Delran and beyond hunger after...

~We want to know what the youth in all our surrounding communities are literally starving for in their lives—physically, emotionally and spiritually.

~We want to help each and every person within this church...and those who haven’t even yet heard of the First UMC of Moorestown be provided with the basic necessities for living an abundant life in Christ.

What do you need...to dare greatly as the people of God? What do you need...to be able to trust that God will provide for you day, by day, by day?

Oh my friends, what are you hungry for?

Today we are reminded to taste and see that the Lord is good. Here at First Church—from youth group to worship, from our Mission Commission to The Servants Round Table, from support groups to supplying food for local food pantries, from Bible studies to our First Light pre-school, WE are here to offer up Life-giving meals of soul food...

May we continue to dare greatly and trust that the Lord’s Got Us...And will keep supporting us...Providing for us...and Guiding us through all our wilderness wanderings! May it be so! Amen and Amen.