

Out of Egypt Sermon Series
Food from Heaven
Exodus 16:2-15
By Rev. Joy W. Laughridge

When I was doing youth ministry, there was an event that I did with my youth groups called the 30 Hour Famine. It was created and promoted by World Vision to teach students about the realities of world hunger and to give them the opportunity to raise money to help alleviate hunger. There are Bible studies and activities, but the challenge at the center of it is to go for 30 hours without eating. I loved doing this with my youth groups and they really loved doing it, but, as you might imagine, there was always just a little accompanying drama with a group of hungry, middle-class, American teenagers. "I'm soooo hungry. I'm soooo weak. How much longer until we can eat?" *Somehow*, they all managed to survive, and I and the rest of their adult leaders managed to survive their whining. Of course, my adult helpers and I weren't the first group of leaders to be surrounded by a group of hungry and complaining people. Way before us, Moses and Aaron found themselves in a similar situation.

At this point in the story, the Israelites had crossed the Red Sea where God saved them from the Egyptians, and they were traveling south along the Eastern edge of the Sinai Peninsula. Three days after the sea crossing, they started grumbling to Moses about being thirsty because there was no fresh water to drink. Moses talked to God about it, and God told Moses to throw a piece of wood into the water and that cleared the water up for them to drink. With their thirst quenched, they traveled on south into the Desert of Sin, and soon they were complaining again - this time about being hungry. Let's listen to the story from 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.

This is the third time since leaving Egypt that we're told that the Israelites complained. It might be easy to shake our heads at them, but to be fair, the situation at the Red Sea was pretty scary, and you can't live without food and water. Their needs were legitimate, and there wasn't going to be an exit up the road with a grocery store or some fast-food restaurants. Maybe they could have said it more nicely, and maybe, like my youth group kids, they were being a little dramatic with all of the talk about how much better off they had been in Egypt, but it's easy to be dramatic when you're "hangry," and God, the ever-patient, ever-loving parent did not delay in responding to their need. Right away God told Moses that food was on the way, but there were some particularities about what the food would be, when it would arrive, and how much to collect.

Some people might not have minded the particularities, but others did. We know that some people didn't want to be bothered with the rules because down in verse 20 we're told that when Moses told them not to keep any of the manna until morning, some of them ignored the instruction and found maggots in the leftover manna when they woke up. It's also noted in verse 26 that when Moses told them that God wasn't going to send any manna on the seventh day so that they could have a day to rest, some people still went out intending to collect some. These rule-breakers seemed happy to have their need met, but their disregard for the instructions suggests that they may have felt some dissatisfaction with the way that God was meeting their need.

They asked for food and God provided it, but some of them wanted more than what was enough for the day, and some of them wanted to stockpile the food. What might have happened if they had been able to take more than they needed each day or if they had been able to gather food seven days a week? All kinds of things might have happened. When some gathered more than their share, others might have been left without enough. The people with the biggest stockpiles might have used their advantage to hold power over others. Their relationships with each other might have suffered, but their relationship with God might have suffered, too. If they had been free to take more than they needed and free to hoard extra supplies, then they could have the comfort of knowing that *just in case* God didn't come through they could survive. And then, before too long, when they had plenty of food stored away, they wouldn't have needed to ask God for food anymore because they would be able to take care of themselves with all the extra food that *they* had saved up.

Isn't that how it is sometimes? When people are truly at the end of themselves and their resources, God becomes very interesting, but when God graciously provides what is needed, it happens that the Provider begins to fade back out of consciousness and trusting in God no longer seems so essential. As God was forming the Israelites through the Exodus events and preparing them to receive his law and enter into a covenant with Him, this is exactly what God didn't want to happen. God didn't want the Israelites to fall out of relationship with Him or to forget that as much as they needed food to meet their physical needs, they needed God to meet their deepest human and spiritual needs. Later we read in Deuteronomy 8:3 how Moses looked back on this time and reminded the Israelites “**[God] humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.**”

Each of us are hearing this story today as people who have needs just like the Israelites did. To be human is to be in need, and our needs drive us toward the things, or the people, or the actions that we believe will help us get our needs met. As people try to get their needs met, it seems to me that there are some common difficulties that we tend to experience. One is that sometimes we aren't good at figuring out the difference between the things that are actual needs and those that just *seem* like a need at a given moment. A second is that we get confused or make mistakes about how to get our needs met, and we end up turning to things that can alleviate the discomfort that our unmet need causes, but they don't really meet the true need. A third

is that we have trouble identifying our truest and deepest needs and so we go around without knowing that we are living without something important in our lives. Being people who have needs can be complicated, and acknowledging that can provoke fear or insecurity, but what we see in the Scripture this morning is that our neediness is not a liability that keeps us from living abundant lives. Instead, what we see in the Scripture is that being in need creates an opportunity to know God as our Provider and to be blessed as God perfectly supplies all of our needs. It's a lesson we learn from this story, and in the Gospels, we see that it's a lesson that Jesus applied in his own life and one that he repeated in his teachings.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all tell about how Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness at the beginning of his public ministry. After fasting for 40 days and nights, he was hungry, and Satan tempted him to use his power to turn stones to bread. Jesus remembered how the Israelites had experienced hunger in the wilderness, and he remembered how God had met their need in a way that taught them to depend on God. Jesus resisted the temptation by quoting the Scripture from Deuteronomy and claiming the truth that one does not live on bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. Even though he was hungry, even though he could have turned the stones to bread instead of waiting for God, Jesus practiced trusting in God and depended on God to give him what he needed which seems to have been strength to resist the temptation more than the bread that would have filled his stomach.

In his teachings, we hear Jesus saying things like this in the Sermon on the Mount. **"...[D]o not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?" (Matt. 6:25-26)** When he taught his disciples to pray, he taught them to say, **"Give us this day our daily bread."** And in John 6, Jesus referred to how God provided manna for the Israelites in the wilderness, and then pointed to himself as God's perfect provision for our needs. In John 6:32-35 he says, **Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread out of heaven to eat.'** ³² Jesus then said to them, **"Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is [□]that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world."** ³⁴ Then they said to Him, **"Lord, always give us this bread."**

³⁵ Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.”

As we listen to all of this as people with needs of our own, it is important for us to know that God took care of the Israelites in the desert and he took care of Jesus in the wilderness, but sometimes even when we know these stories we wonder, yes, but will God actually take care of *me*? Will God really show up in my life now to give me what I need? I caught up with a friend yesterday who was telling me that she lost her job about a month ago. She is a single mom and she works hard to provide for her son. There were some things about the job that were not good so in some ways it was a relief to be set free, but she needed it. Then, within 2 weeks she received a call out of the blue about another job that was available. Not only was it a job, but the pay is better, it comes with benefits, and there is flexibility to make her own schedule.

I share this story to say, yes, even today, Jesus knows what we need and is ready to be our Provider. If there is something that you need today - a physical need, an emotional need, or a spiritual one - whatever it may be, if you are hungry for something, Jesus is inviting you today to turn to him and know him as the Bread of Life. He is inviting us to allow ourselves to be humbled by our needs and to let him take care of us, not necessarily in the way that we think he should, but according to his wisdom and love. He knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows what we actually need, and he knows how and when we need to receive it.

When I did the 30 Hour Famine with my youth groups, those 30 hours of being hungry opened their eyes to see things that they didn't normally notice, or know, or think about when they weren't feeling hungry. Feeling their own hunger helped them learn about the needs of others, and it became an opportunity for them to lean on Jesus to help them through those hours that were hard for them. That time in the desert when the Israelites were hungry became a teachable moment for them, too. They learned that God would help them when they asked, and they learned how to depend on God daily to give them just enough. When we have needs, they can be for us, too, those eye-opening, faith-building experiences through which we learn to feast on Jesus and be satisfied. May it be so. Amen.