

Sunday, August 1, 2021

The Israelites said to Moses, "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; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

What a picture of human nature. The Israelites, fresh delivered from the hands of their captors surround Moses with raised voices and raised hands. Surely they also brought raised expectations in their moment of hunger. It makes you wonder what people expect. Story goes, they had seen seven awful plagues visited upon their Egyptian captors, then they saw the water of the Red Sea stack up in rows to let them pass through on dry feet. It turns out they are not in Moses face about an issue of faith, they believe in this God of his who they saw turn the Nile to blood. Now they want to know if they can get a better deal out of this God while they are headed to the land God promises. So there on the road they confront Moses who in turn confronts God who in turn says Okay listen, tell them to go back into their tents and in the morning when they wake there will be a fine coating on the floor of the dessert. It will look like a frost, but hey this is the Middle East. It is actually the bread they have requested. Tell them I'm sorry the quail provided were not to their satisfaction, and that I hope the rest of their trip will be comfortable for them.

That really is sort of the way the conversation goes. God bends into a divine pretzel to satisfy the needs, the concerns of these chosen people, no matter how obstinate their attitude and how unreasonable their request. Along the road God will also bring water out of dry rocks, provide a cure for snakebite, lead by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. We have lost sight of that God somewhere between that desert full of Manna and the lesson from Ephesians. That does not mean we lost God. We can't seem to do that, no matter how we rail and

complain, no matter how high our expectations. This great God of ours is there to meet and exceed them.

So we are entering a season in the three year lectionary known by preachers everywhere as “all that bread in year B” We complain that the images of bread will follow us from here into the fall of the year. We worry that we can only say so many things about food and bread more particularly. We worry that we will not keep your attention, talking about yeast and rising and resting and rising again. We will fidget when we hear of one of our colleagues straying off into the Old Testament lesson or preaching on the creed or some popular saint that came up during the former week but the truth is, We are here right in the middle of’ bread land” as Jesus says to the people on the hillside – I am the bread of life.

I could stand before you and tell you that I know exactly what Jesus meant when he said that. I could tell you that he meant to be bread for all of us but, two of you would remind me of your gluten intolerance, and another handful would say that you are eating “low carbs” this month. So what’s a preacher to do? It sound a bit like Moses in the wilderness doesn’t it? All we have here in the middle of nowhere are these boney little quail and this bread that just keeps falling out of the sky. Is there a Starbucks between here and Palestine?

So, here is the truth my sisters and brothers. There is no Starbucks between here and the promised land. We may not always get our needs met in the color and flavor of the month. But we can depend on a God that holds us up and leads us on to a place that we can finally call home. We can depend on a God who cares enough to send a divine Son to infiltrate humanity, to figure out what makes us tick, what it feels like to live in skin, to experience hunger and loneliness and loved and misfortune. We can depend on this God to respond to every need we are willing to toss in the face of God’s prophet of the moment, but we must take a lesson from the Hebrew

children there in the wilderness. Because what they teach us is important. What if they had not asked for bread? What if they had not complained about no food?

What if they just settled? Then just settling would have been their reward. It is their insistent complaining that changes the run of the story. It is their expectation that Turns God's hand. It is their hunger that triggers the great miracle of feeding in Hebrew scripture. Our Jewish forebears are better at this than we are. How often is it that we just settle for the way things are, and refrain from pushing on God and the community. We are worried somehow that God won't listen, that nothing will happen and that there we will be, standing in front of the great congregation exposed to everyone as God says, "No, Joe. Your issue really isn't that important and I am not going to answer your request. Now go sit down."

That is not the way God works, but it is our fear. And I wonder if it is the reason that so many of us are determined, if not content, to get by and make do in lives that are not full, journeys that are not productive, jobs that are not fulfilling, dreams that never come true. Yes perhaps we whisper these needs in prayer to God but do we share them with those around us? Do we let the "Body of Christ on Earth," (that would be the church) hear the contents of what we seek and what we dream about our lives? And if we do not, then how would we expect God to answer our needs through the only hands and feet and arms God seems to have stationed here. If we believe that God uses the church to minister to humans in times of crisis, in the face of disaster, in a moment of terror through the presence of the church, then why in God's name would we not expect God to minister to us, God's children, through that same church when we are lonely, hungry, unimportant or just having a bad day? Why indeed. And, what if the reason we see so few miracles of manna in our own time is that we are too proud to ask. This is not a

self-centered game God plays to show us who is boss. Rather it is a respectful response to our own free will that tells us that God will not force us into faith, but will answer our needs.

Listen to the words from Ephesians, *“I beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.* These words familiar from the baptismal service remind us that we belong to God and God belongs to us and that in this mystery of one faith and one God, no one needs to be left out. We follow a Christ who calls himself the bread of life. We live in a community of faith that shares concern for one another. We follow a God that answers the needs we share with one another. But when we really get it, when we really figure out this mystical presence of God in the church, will be when we discover that every act of kindness, every dime invested in the church, every moment spent assuring another human being of their worth is not just our working off some bad karma or storing something up for later in heaven. In the vast economy of God’s reign we are the answers to one another’s prayers we are the keys to one another’s salvation. We are the path for one another’s journey. We bear one another’s burdens. Stand and rail toward heaven if you will, and it may seem your prayers go unanswered, but speak your deepest needs and dreams to the body of Christ which is around you and you will be satisfied. God calls us to a community in which he who asks receives, he who forgives is forgiven, he who reaches out for God is never left wanting.

Jesus said, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”