

2020 09 20 – Bread from Heaven

Exodus 16:2-15

It is month and a half since the Israelites left Egypt. They have already experienced great thirst in the desert and now they are entering the wilderness of Syn. Their journey is not an easy one: the terrain is difficult and the travellers have found very little to eat or drink. They start to remember the good things about slavery in Egypt. They remember pots of meat over the fire and fresh-baked loaves of bread and they start to complain to their leader Moses and his brother, Aaron, saying and I paraphrase, “We would rather YHWH had killed us with full stomachs in Egypt instead of you leading us into the wilderness to die of hunger!”

Wilderness journeys are hard and, whether we like it or not, they are a part of life. Sometimes we travel in the wilderness alone, sometimes with our family or community, sometimes with our country. Right now, our whole world is on a wilderness journey called COVID-19. It's a journey filled with fear and uncertainty. It's a journey where we fear for our health, our wealth, our life as we know it. It's a journey with lots of ups and downs. And everywhere we hear people complaining to our leaders saying, “I'd rather go back to celebrating weddings, going to concerts, worshiping in my church, going to school, working in my office knowing that I could get sick and die rather than slowly dying from loneliness, boredom, depression or financial ruin.” Of course we are complaining; it's natural to complain when times are tough and difficult choices need to be made.

In today's story, YHWH hears the people and says to Moses, "Look, I will rain down bread from heaven for you," and later YHWH continues, "In the evening you will eat meat, and in the morning you will have your fill of bread. Then you will know that I, YHWH, am your God." That evening, migrating quail fly in and the hungry travellers quickly become hunters. The next morning, after the dew evaporates, there are flakes of something on the ground. It is delicate, powdery, fine like frost. The Israelites see the flakes and call it "manna" meaning "whatzit" or "whatchamacallit", having no idea what they are looking at. But Moses tells them, "This is the bread YHWH has given you to eat."

We are currently on a global wilderness journey, and we have all been on our own personal journeys before. We have all experienced times of upheaval and change, times of loss and grief, times of uncertainty and fear. And we have all experienced the blessing of bread from heaven.

That bread comes in many different forms. When we are reeling from the loss of a loved one, people literally drop bread from heaven—in the form of casseroles, muffins, sliced meat and cheese—at our doorsteps. Bread from heaven may also come in the form of people or cards or books or flowers.

This week I read a blog by Rev. Cameron Trimble, minister and executive director of a leading-edge church organization called the Centre for Progressive Renewal. She writes:

Recently I had a beautiful conversation with a colleague. Her mother had passed away, and she faced the overwhelming task of cleaning out her home. Weeks passed as she faced into the grief she knew this would bring and wrestled with the best way to approach the work.

By a stroke of providence, she connected with a woman who ran an estate sales company. In conversation with her, the woman said to her, "Go through the house and take only what you want. Take all the time you need. Then leave the rest to us. We will take care of it."

As my colleague reflected on that moment, she said, "Her saying those words to me was the most wonderful act of grace. I felt such relief. It allowed me to grieve my mother without the burden of the rest."

<https://convergenceus.org/2020/09/18/piloting-faith-take-only-what-you-need/>

For Cameron Trimble's colleague, that woman from the estate sales company was her "bread from heaven." It was what helped her navigate the wilderness of grief and loss. It was what helped sustain her in her time of fear and uncertainty. I am now going to invite you to think of the wilderness times in your life, including the one you are living in right now and to name the "bread from heaven" that you have received. What is it that has helped to keep you sane in the midst of this pandemic? What was it that kept you going in another difficult time in your life?

If you are comfortable doing so, please name your manna and share it with the rest of us by typing it into the chat. I will read aloud as many as I can. While you

begin to type, I will share that in my wilderness times, it is often books, especially stories of people going through a similar experience, that have helped me to survive and to thrive. I have also used meditation, walking in nature and journaling to help me through my most painful wilderness journeys. What has been your bread from heaven? *(leave time for people to type – some possible examples: gardening, letters, phone calls, Zoom, time in nature, meditation, prayer)*

Thank you for sharing so deeply. I believe that the most important thing we need in wilderness times is the knowledge that we are not alone in our struggles. The Israelites knew they were not alone when the quail flew in and delicate flakes covered the ground. All of the gifts, the bread from heaven, that you have named are reminders that we are not alone. We are connected to a God that is the Essence of Love, a God that is the Ground of our Being. That deep connection manifests itself in all the ways that we have named today: through people, through organizations, through technology, through prayer, through meditation, and through the beauty and the glory of God's creation.

We all know how difficult wilderness journeys can be. They are a time of testing and trial. So let us give thanks for all the ways that YHWH sustains us with bread from heaven. And let us pray for the many circles of care that bring us healing and hope. May we have the strength, the courage and the faith to trust in the everlasting love of the Holy Mystery, the Ground of our Being. Amen.