

Exodus 16:1-21; Luke 11 :1-4
Daily Bread
Sunday March 19th, 2017

Last week I mentioned that unleavened bread was a symbol of breaking from the past. In fact I said, “By making unleavened bread, God’s people were concretely demonstrating their break from the past. It wasn’t just bread starter they left behind in Egypt.

They had lived in Egypt for 400 years and had learned the Egyptian language, culture, and religion. God wanted them to have a clean, complete break with Egypt in every way. God particularly wanted them to break from the culture and religion.”

God was going to create a new people with new laws and new faith practice, and they needed a clean complete break from their past.

The desert is a great place to do this. It is devoid of the distractions of settled life of the Delta region of Egypt with its leeks, and melons, and mutton and abundance of leavened bread.



The rich fertile soil of the Nile Delta provided a seductive call to worship the gods of the Egyptians.



The Sinai desert the Israelites went through was stark and dry and seemingly sterile. They had to trust in God who had called them there or they were to die. The desert they were in was not as verdant as the one we live in. It seems something is always growing here at Vista that has to be chopped down, just ask the Landscape Crew.



The desert that Jesus was tested in was even starker. Again total trust in God or die.

The desert is the place to go to, to find one's identity. This is what Israel did. They found in the 40 years in the desert that they were the children of God and God their Father would take care of them.

Jesus in the 40 days he spent in the desert he solidified his identity as the Son of God and was sorely tested in this by the devil.

The desert is the place to go to, to find and solidify one's identity; to find and solidify one's character. It is the place where ask and answer the question, **"Are you a child of God who trusts in God the Father, or do you worship the gods of Egypt, of comfort and security?"** Indeed, where do you find your security?

This searching to find oneself in the desert, in tough, austere environment, alone, away from the comforts of everyday life, is common in many cultures. In some Native American cultures there is a rite-of-passage called the "Vision Quest" in which a young man leaves home and undergoes a period of testing (usually in the wilderness) and denial in order to discover who he is, and what his place is in his community. It is a search for identity.

After God rescued the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt, Moses led them into the wilderness, heading toward Mount Sinai. It was time to learn some important lessons about God who had rescued them, and who they were in relationship to God. What better place than the desert or wilderness to do that. In the furnace of the Sinai desert their identity was forged.

But as you know the Israelites did not like the wilderness. Life may not have been that good in Egypt, but at least they had good things to eat. So they began to complain. **"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.”

They preferred the seeming abundance of slavery to the freedom that is found in following God. Freedom is always bought at a terrible price, and so easily given away.

So God reacted to their ingratitude and their concern. He wasn't angry. He didn't scold them he just provided.

As our reading said, “I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day.

In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not.

On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days.”

Every morning, the people could go out and collect bread. It was a flaky substance they called “**manna**”. In Hebrew, the word “Manna” literally translates, “**What is this stuff?**” They looked at this strange food, the ultimate unleavened bread and said, “What is it?”

In college I went on an Archaeological dig in Northern Arizona near Springerville. We were camped out in tents in the forest. Our cooks provided us with some, let us say, unusual meals, because it was a long way to town. I remember asking one evening as some unrecognizable pile of goo plopped on my plate, “what is it?”



To which the cook replied with some considerable disdain, “Dinner.” I was so hunger I just sat down and ate it.

So God provided the Israelites with manna, bread, and with the manna came a test. They were to gather each morning only enough to meet their needs for that day. If they gathered more than they needed, if they tried to store it or hoard it, the manna spoiled—it turned rotten and became worm-infested. So their issue was whether there was going to be something to eat the next day or not. Will there be **“Daily Bread”**.

The lesson they were learning in the wilderness was to trust God to provide for each day. And when they trusted that God would provide, God was found to be faithful. Manna was there every day. They did not need to worry about whether or not they had food.

What the lesson from this ancient story is this. **First, trust God to provide for your future.** As the Israelites gathered manna every day and experienced God’s faithfulness, they began to trust that God would provide for their future.

They found they didn’t need to worry whether or not the manna would be there tomorrow. They didn’t hoard it because they felt insecure about the future.

But what about us? Do we trust God to provide for our future needs? Or do we hoard what we have so that we can have a secure future?

There is a lot of wisdom in setting aside resources in the present in order to be able to enjoy security in the future, and most here are living proof of that wisdom. But the faith question is where do we put our trust? US currency provides a good answer. It says, “In God we trust.”

But do we put more trust in our investments than in God? Part of the Biblical answer to that question comes in giving away a part of our income. That Biblical answer was to give a tithe, a tenth, from the first fruits of the harvest. The idea being that we have faith in God providing the other 90% for our needs after we give God the first tenth.

That is the faith part of sacrificial giving. When we give today, we trust that God will provide tomorrow.

John Wesley gave some great advice about money: making it, giving it away, and saving it; and it wasn't based on a percentage. Remember, he said the following in the days before retirement systems and social security.

Make all you can. (We like that!)

Save all you can. (Sounds good!)

And give all you can. (Really, yes it tempers greed and shows faith)

Following these three rules the early Methodists prospered, and so did the movement of making disciples.

The lesson of the wilderness is that if we trust only in our wealth and hoard it, we will find that in the end our wealth has spoiled and become worm-infested. Often times it doesn't disappear, but the fear of it disappearing spoils the joy of the daily living of our lives.

God often doesn't give us today what we will need for the future, that's because he wants us to trust him. God wants us to be faithful with what he's given us today. That's the first lesson: **Trust God to provide for your future.**

There is a second lesson we can learn from the wilderness: **God will meet your need, not your greed.** God didn't give the Israelites what they wanted; he gave them what they needed. He didn't give them T-bone steaks and cinnamon rolls. He gave them the basics: manna (bread) and quail. They may not have liked the manna. They complained about it, but God met their basic need for food. God met their need not their greed.

You know most advertising is to make you feel inadequate and what you have not measuring up to the next best and brightest thing. So the more commercials we see, the more we think: wouldn't it be nice if we had a new car, a bigger house, a better cell phone, new clothes? Just fill in the blank.

We all have in our lives things that we desire, and the lie is that owning these things will make us happier. That's the lie we are sold in all those commercials. The reality is that if we follow our desires we will never have enough; we will always wind up wanting more.

Rockefeller was once asked how much money was enough. His reply was, "Just one dollar more." The point being the desire to acquire is insatiable, unless what we desire is God.

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus taught us to pray for daily bread. He, too, had learned the lessons of the wilderness that the only source of true bread is God.

But Jesus in his prayer added a lesson of his own. Our prayer for daily bread is always prayed in community. It is always in the plural. We don't ask for "my daily bread." Bread is not mine, for me alone. Bread is given by God for the community. Daily bread is meant to be shared. In the Lord's Prayer we actually pray that the whole world may be fed.

This idea is expressed in a poem from the "Omaha Home for Boys."

You cannot pray the Lord's Pray and even once say "I".

You cannot pray the Lord's Prayer and even once say "My".

Nor can you pray the Lord's Prayer and not pray for one another,

And when you ask for daily bread, you must include your brother.

For others are included in each and every plea,

From the beginning to the end of it, it does not once say "Me".

The lesson of the wilderness is that God promises to meet our needs. Jesus knows that our most basic need in life is for relationship with him.

It is in relationship with Jesus we find forgiveness for our sins and forgiveness for others, and unconditional love for all.

It is in relationship with Jesus that we become part of the community of the children of God.

God, here in the desert of Arizona is forging us into his family, the Church, Vista Church. In that community we find our most basic need is met for relationship with God and relationship with one another.

Jesus offers that relationship to you today.

He offers us the identity of God's children who have a loving Father who will take care of us in all our needs.

This is God's word? Will you be a part?

In Jesus' name, amen.