


“A Change in Perspective”

Sunday, September 24th, 2017

16th Sunday after Pentecost

#4 in Series: EXODUS: Gods calls, provides, and fulfills

 **Exodus 16:2-15 (NRSV)**

Today we’re going to wrap up our look at the Exodus story as we find the Israelites wandering in the wilderness and whining about their new situation.

Whine, whine, whine! Complain, complain, complain! That’s all the Israelites do.

But, is that what this story is really about?

The stubbornness of the Israelites and their inability to accept their freedom?

Let’s take a look at the story and dig a little deeper.

[Read from NRSV Bible]

This is the Word of God for the people of God.

Thanks, be to God.

[2ND Service: Affirmation of Faith]

[MESSAGE]

Last Sunday we talked about how many people, throughout history, have found themselves facing “*The Red Sea*” on one side and “*The Egyptian Army*” on the other.

There seems to be no good choice to get out of their predicament; forward or backward looks equally treacherous.

Moses, Aaron, and Miriam were charged with the task of leading the people to the place where God would make a way through for them.

Even as God continues to rescue the people, everything doesn't go as the people expect or desire.

The difficulties they encounter serve to change their perspective.

We find here a story that describes the growing relationship between the children of Israel and their God.

Their need provides both God and God's people with an opportunity to understand and trust the other.

Let us pray... Lord, as we go deeper into Scripture, we continually come to stories that challenge our understanding of you. Help us to engage different perspectives that may lead us to deeper faith. In Jesus' name, we pray. **Amen.**

So, the story so far has been:

The people reach the seashore and cry, “*Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness.*”

God saves the day by providing a way to cross the sea to safety.

The Israelites throw a big party to celebrate their miraculous deliverance.

Just three days later, the people are thirsty and they grumble again, “*What shall we drink?*”

Once again, God intervenes and creates an oasis for them.

Then, on the fifteenth day of the second month of their journey they are hungry.

“If only we had died at 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.”

“If only we had...”

“If only I had...”

Words of regret in the present and of fear for the future. ***“If only...”***

The Israelites cried out to God and God sent leaders to guide them out of their oppression.

At every juncture, God was there.

Yet, the grumblings, the “if only’s”, are a constant theme in these wilderness stories.

But, is that really what this is all about?

Let’s look at this from a different perspective.

The reality television series **“Survivor”** has shown its viewers what happens to groups of people forced to survive together under difficult circumstances.

They can turn on one another quickly.

Hunger and thirst are powerful motivators that can lead to drastic reactions.

People get angry and people complain.

After the Israelites make covenant with God at Mt. Sinai, the Bible writers cast judgment on the Israelites for their complaining.

But, here in these stories before That milestone encounter with God, we should not see their complaining in a strictly negative light.

Are they not responding as any human being would in the face of threats to their survival and the survival of their families?

Instead, these stories focus on **God's response**.

We would be better served by changing our perspective to think about the Exodus in terms of God's response to humanity.

Remember, we've said it before – The Bible is **not our story**, it is **God's story**.

We are not the central characters in this epic tale; God is the star here.

When the people complain, they are targeting Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.

Yet, God responds by telling Moses that he will
“rain bread from heaven.”

There will be enough for each day only; except for the sixth day, when they will be able to gather enough for two days.

There will be no bread from heaven on the Sabbath; the diner is closed on Sundays.

On the Sabbath day, both God and God’s people will rest.

“In this way,” God says, *“I will test them.”*

God tests the people to see if they will follow instructions; to see if they will trust him.

It’s interesting that God tells Moses to tell the people all about the way this test will take place and what the *“rules of the game”* are.

But, Moses takes a lot of liberty when he relays the message to the people.

“In the evening, you will know that it was Yahweh who brought you out of the land of Egypt and in the morning, you will see the glory of Yahweh.”

Moses interprets God’s promise to rain bread from heaven as a means for the people to come to know their deliverer.

He believes the people need to see a miracle to believe that God provides; so, he tells them what he thinks they need to hear, not exactly what God told him to say.

Another perspective might be to imagine that Moses meant for God to overhear his speech to the people.

As Moses speaks to these hungry, angry people gathered before him in the wilderness, eager to rebel, perhaps Moses suggests to God that talk of testing and rules is not really what is called for in this moment.

What these tired and hungry people really need is more along the lines of a pep talk, a promise.

It is remarkable that God responds to the people's need for assurance and for a promise, accompanied by a visible sign of presence, of provision, and guidance.

But, God does something else in this passage.

God designs and implements a plan to shape these former slaves into the people of Yahweh.

Before their liberation, the Israelites only knew life in Egypt, an empire where they built storehouses for food, where they were exposed to constant hoarding, competition for resources, and where human lives were abused and broken to fuel the hunger of the elite.

Here, God acknowledges not only the Israelites' need for assurance, but also God's desire to shape them as a different kind of people., a different kind of community.

In the ritual practice of daily gathering food that falls from the sky, they will learn, through their labor, to come to trust God.

They will learn to share their human resources with one another and with others equitably.

They will come to know a food distribution system that is directly opposed to the one designed by Pharaoh.

The keeping of the Sabbath will remind them that they are more than the technologies of the empire; they are human beings who, like God, require rest and rejuvenation.

Even in crisis, with chaos all around, Sabbath rest is essential to their lives and their emerging identities.

This is a big change in perspective for them and for us.

In the Story of God, we shown the right way to live as people of God and the wrong ways.

We see the slaves and the slave masters; we see the “haves” and “have-nots.”

It is clear who God favors with grace, mercy, and love.

This story gives the promise of God’s provision.

God shows, through God's own example, that part of the structure of our days and weeks must be the keeping of Sabbath.

When we're in stressful times, Sabbath brings order to chaos through daily prayer and weekly worship.

It may be a difficult concept in the twenty-first century world.

How can we simply stop what we're doing?

What will happen to our jobs, our families, our sense of identity if we just stop for Sabbath?

And, what does it really mean to "stop"?

Stopping has to do with taking time to contemplate our place within the created world.

Stopping has to do with reflecting on the good provisions of God in our lives.

Stopping can happen whenever we need it to.

Manna was a gift to our ancestors and a test; food for the journey and a test of faith in God's provision.

Manna from God, in whatever form it takes in our daily lives, is God's promise to provide for us; it is up to us to gather the manna during the days it is given and to trust God to give us manna during the days of stopping – the days of Sabbath rest.

Every good thing comes from God and the real test is our willingness to gather only what we need and to find ways to help others get what they need.

Our model is not the system of the Pharaoh, but the system of the Creator.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

The other thing that strikes me is the way God takes this situation and uses it to help the people understand their need for God to turn chaos into order. God brings structure to their lives as a way of teaching them how to cope with the realities of life in the real world.

Finally, we see a metaphor in this story that guides us to a better understanding of God's provision for us in circumstances that are entirely different from the ancient Israelites. How do we respond to God's provision? Are we eager to accept it and prepared to benefit from it?