

Delivery

The Rev. Geoff Parker to First Parish Church - Brunswick, ME

Sunday, August 5, 2018

Scripture: [Exodus 16:2-4, 9-15](#)

Introduction to the Scripture

Our scripture today comes from the part of Exodus that is kind of the “great hereafter” of that story. I think if you asked a lot of people, you would think that Exodus ended as the Israelites crossed the Red Sea leaving Pharaoh’s army in ruin behind them, nothing but freedom and a pillar of fire and smoke ahead of them.

But it doesn’t end there. There is in fact a long family trip to go.

And the Israelites are hungry. So hungry they begin to question if this has all been worth it.

Sermon

My wife, Julia and I both lived in New York City for a season or so of our lives. We both have pretty horrible memories of this time of year there: 5th floor walk ups with no air conditioning, with windows that only look out over heat baked alleys between buildings... It is pretty oppressive in the summer. However, there are occasions when we do return, and if you live in Mid Coast Maine and you want to have an appreciation for New York, I recommend that you do one thing: order out. We can, almost every night in the city, find ourselves cackling maniacally at the possibilities for ordering food. Any ethnicity, any flavor, any size, from almost anywhere... food. As if by magic.

When we moved into the center of Bath, we gained a single pizza chain that will deliver to us. It was a miracle.

There is nothing quite like the experience of the richness and flavor of *exactly what you have been hungering for* showing up when you need it. Maybe delivery is the most powerful extreme that I see on a regular basis of this experience of food “out of nowhere.” But... well, of course not. Here in this season in Maine there are blueberries coming up from the ground and apples starting to form in the ends of tree branches. There are carrots and more growing silently underfoot.

When we stop to think about it, many of us see lots of abundance, and many of us may be far distant from a sense of being truly hungry. I don’t mean cranky because we’re late getting our grilled cheese hungry, I mean the gnawing, empty, grinding in our bellies kind of hungry.

That’s what Moses comes up against today, the hangriest of the hangry Israelites who have found their freedom, but lost their way on the other side of the Red Sea. At various times in their travels, Moses will kind of roll his eyes at the Israelites, but here he is a good and connected leader: you don’t mess around with feeding your people. He goes to God with the complaint of the people. And you know what? God delivers. Manna, this sticky sweet bread on the ground and quails... were they already cooked? But... food where there was none.

The Israelites stand in here as us, in all our “are we there yet??” grumbling glory to show us that the gifts of God which sustain us are not offered to us because we are our best shining selves. God doesn’t feed us—or ask us to feed each other—because we are particularly pleasant, or because we never pull a “Are we there yet?” Like Israel, we are shaped by the journey as much as the promise of God’s destination... we are a becoming people.

God offers food without price because it is a sign of God’s mercy, God’s justice, and God’s grace.

Manna and quails you don’t *earn*. Israel had just come from Pharaoh, where they could never cease their labors, never stop making bricks, if they wanted to eat. That’s what they forget in their moment of self-destructive wishing... they forget that those meals cost them their lives.

Pharaoh’s food you have to *earn*. But God’s food? It just arrives, rich and sweet on the ground. The measure of God’s food, the test God sets up here is this: Can we trust enough to take just enough? Can we be just with it? Can we get over our anxiety that someone is going to come along and *get ours* and our fear that we need to horde up enough to last us through?

The prophets will sing of this food and this meal: Milk and honey without price, food for all to share.

Hundreds of years later, Mary, even as she makes her body food for God, she sings: the hungry will be fed with good things, and the rich will be sent away empty... It is in fact, Jesus’s first lullaby.

So, Jesus grows to sit at a table with friends who have misunderstood him, wondered at him, all who will desert him, one who will deny him, one who will betray him, and says: take, eat, this is all I am, but it is for you.

Through all these stories, and so many more, God reminds us of the abundance that we are called to see, and then to participate in. Sometimes, even through late night delivery you can taste it... remembering that all we taste is a gift, all we have is a gift, and all we can hope to be at our most tender or terrible is a gift.

We should remember this as we strive to make a just and loving world around us: over and over again God proclaims that hunger unites us in our humanity, but we are also united in our holiness: God’s feeding is not something we earn, or could ever hope to, but something that comes as a free gift of love and grace.

We should remember this in the midst of currently debated farm bills that allow ever increasing work requirements on nutrition and food assistance, installing Pharaoh over others to count their hours of labor. We should remember this when policies support the mega and mono crops of corporations over the local farmers that literally bring food to the hungry in our community. We should remember that in 2016, 6.5 *million* children lived in food insecure homes^[1]. We should remember that Maine is home to some of the largest swaths of food deserts in New England.^[2]

We should remember that God makes food in the desert. We should remember that God’s supplemental nutrition plan is take what you need and leave enough for the rest.

We should remember to give thanks for abundance every time we find it. In a meal shared with friends in the heat of summer. In the romance and richness of food that appears as if by magic. In the smallest hunk of bread kneaded, and watched over, and then broken open and given one to the other.

This is God’s own gift. Delivered. For you. Not because you are smart, or beautiful, or kind.... though you can be all those things, and more as well. Don’t you see? This food is for you... because you were hungry... take,

eat, share. Amen.

1. [USDA ERS - Key Statistics & Graphics ↩](#)
2. [Maine Office of GIS and USDA Map ↩](#)