**September 27, 2020 Exodus 16:2-15**

***What You Need***

**Scripture:** Exodus 16:2-15 NRSV

*(2)The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. (3)The Israelites said to them, "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." (4)Then the LORD said to Moses, "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. (5)On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days."  (6)So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "In the evening you shall know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, (7)and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your complaining against the LORD. For what are we, that you complain against us?" (8)And Moses said, "When the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the LORD has heard the complaining that you utter against him--what are we? Your complaining is not against us but against the LORD." (9)Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, 'Draw near to the LORD, for he has heard your complaining.'" (10)And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. (11)The LORD spoke to Moses and said, (12)"I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.'" (13)In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. (14)When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. (15)When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat.*

**Notes:**

1. God heard their ***complaining*** and responded.
   1. God told them; you’ll be sure to ***know*** that I am ***God***.
   2. ***Manna*** had to be gathered in the morning,.
   3. ***Manna*** was a staple of nourishment for forty years.
   4. The people were ***desperate***, God gave them just ***enough***.
   5. They couldn’t see past their ***empty*** ***stomachs***,
2. What do we ***really*** ***need***?
   1. Physiological - ***basic*** physical needs ***food****,* ***water****,* and ***air***.
   2. Safety – a place where we are ***protected****,* ***clothing****, and* ***shelter***.
   3. Love/belonging– a place where we feel a ***connection*** to ***others***.
   4. Esteem, a ***confidence*** or a ***caring*** about our self.
   5. Self-actualization - ability to become the ***best*** ***version*** of ourself.
3. We don’t see ***everything*** we have because we are mesmerized by the ***illusion*** of what we think we need.
   1. Notice the ***abundance*** we have.
   2. We spend our lives ***striving*** for what we feel we need,
   3. How would our lives ***change***, if we were able to see the world through the eyes of God’s ***gracious*** ***provision***?
   4. God will always ***provide*** what we need, the sustenance that fills our lives is ***enough***.
   5. Let us look at the world through the eyes of God’s ***gracious*** ***provision***.

**Script:**

I have been camping almost every year since I was 11 or 12 years old. In my childhood my parents would make all of the arrangements and planning. But as I moved into adulthood, I learned that if I went camping, I needed to plan for my own needs. Jan and I have been blessed to be able to go camping next week. Traveling to Lynchburg Virginia for a few days, then Asheville NC, and then Cambridge OH to celebrate Stevin’s birthday with him.

So what do we need when we go camping? What will we wear each day, or will we wear the same clothes each day? Where will we bathe each day, will the campground have a bathhouse? Will we bathe from a basin with a washcloth; or will we just change clothes and wipe off the best we can? What will we do for entertainment? Will we cook over a fire or use cooking devices in the camper or take a camp stove? And what will we eat? Will we eat at restaurants? Will we eat at the campsite? What food Items will we take and where will they be stored? Will we need refrigeration and what would that look like?

If you have ever gone camping you get an idea of what I am talking about. We have so many comforts and we take many of them for granted, until we are faced with hardship, and struggle, and the fear of going hungry or getting sick from eating spoiled food.

Today we are still traveling with the Hebrews who have escaped slavery from Pharaoh. Remember they were told to gather as much as they could carry, and prepare to leave. They ate their last meal in slavery with their traveling clothes on. When they received the word, they were off and moving, only to be pursued by the Pharaoh and his armies. When they arrive at the sea, they begin to complain to Moses, and through the Lord’s guidance Moses raises his hand over the water, and walls of water moved to the left and right to reveal a dry path for them to travel on. When the Hebrews were safe on the other side the Lord instructed Moses to raise his hands over the water again and the water returned to its normal depth destroying the pursuing Egyptians. Today we find the Hebrews complaining again; turn with me in your Bibles to Exodus 16:2-15.

(2)The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. (3)The Israelites said to them, "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." (4)Then the LORD said to Moses, "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. (5)On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days."  (6)So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "In the evening you shall know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, (7)and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your complaining against the LORD. For what are we, that you complain against us?" (8)And Moses said, "When the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the LORD has heard the complaining that you utter against him--what are we? Your complaining is not against us but against the LORD." (9)Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, 'Draw near to the LORD, for he has heard your complaining.'" (10)And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. (11)The LORD spoke to Moses and said, (12)"I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.'" (13)In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. (14)When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. (15)When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat. Exodus 16:2-15 NRSV

Today we’re telling the story of the Hebrews’ first experiences in the desert of the Sinai Peninsula. It’s been a few weeks since living through one of the most astounding experiences ever fleeing Egypt and escaping with their lives right through the middle of the sea. When we left them last week they were celebrating on the edge of the water, slapping tambourines and singing with disbelief and pure joy. Finally experiencing what they’d only dreamed of their whole entire lives; freedom and the possibility of building their own nation.

And who knows the time frame exactly, probably it was a few weeks into their desert adventure when the reality of their situation hit them, and hit them hard. The idea of escape got them moving and their focus was on leaving, not what to take with them. They’d not given much thought to the logistics of travel, they were certainly more prepared to survive in the desert than you and I would be, but think about the enormous and overwhelming issues related to leading a whole nation of people, with all their animals and children and possessions, out into the desert and camping. By the time we get to our story this morning, they’d already experienced problems with drinking water, and now the food was about to run out.

Well, what happened next is not surprising. We saw it last week on the shore of the Red Sea looking out over the water, and today it happens again, constituting what we might call a pattern of behavior, a pattern we see again and again with the traveling Hebrews: they start complaining. They gathered around Moses and Aaron, saying things like: *“Hey, thanks a lot for bringing out here to DIE*. *Egypt was forced labor, sure, but at least we had enough to eat.”* And, they had a point.

Clean water and healthy food were critical if the group was going to make it to Canaan. They had a long, difficult journey ahead of them; the issue of supplies was critical; they were worried about how they would feed their children. It’s not unreasonable to be headed out on a long camping trip and wondering how to handle the logistics, right? So, the people complained because they could see the problems facing them but couldn’t imagine what solutions they might find.

The text says, God heard their complaining and responded. Miraculously, food would appear, God said. In the evening they would have meat and, in the morning, bread, every single day. That way, God told them, you’ll be sure to know that I am God. It was quail at night, meat that provided enough protein for the whole big group. In the morning, manna, like frost on the ground, a fine, flaky substance God called bread. Nobody knows what manna actually was. It’s described in other parts of the text as tasting like flour with honey, or bread with oil. Its name, comes from an informal expression which meant “What is this??!?”

We learn that manna had to be gathered in the morning, as the sun melted it. Every day the people gathered six or seven pints of manna per person, and no more, except on the eve of the Sabbath, when they were instructed to gather enough for two days. Apparently, whatever it was exactly, the people were able to eat it the way it was or grind it in a mill, boil it or make it into cakes. Other food was available when the people could trade or hunt, but manna was the staple of their nourishment. The people would have died without the daily supply every single morning, from that first day that God provided for forty years, every single morning, until the people reached the land they were promised.

It’s a very simple theological situation here … can you see it? The people were desperate, so they asked God for help. God gave them just enough to meet their needs, day after day after day after day. It’s simple really, we should just pack up our Bibles and head home, lesson learned. But we can’t, can we? Because it’s not so simple for us and it turns out it was never that simple for them, either.

Like the Hebrews, there are lots of things we need. But, with God’s generous provision we have everything we need, don’t we? It seems we often get stuck right there, where the Israelites found themselves in our Hebrew text this morning, gazing out over the wilderness in front of them and seeing nothing except what they didn’t have. Desiring more.

They had just been delivered from 400 years of slavery in Egypt! God miraculously protected them from plagues and illness while their oppressors suffered. They had just lived through an experience of provision so miraculous that we’re still making movies out of it thousands of years later.

But when their stomachs started grumbling, all they could think about was what they didn’t have; nothing close to the bounty of food they had in Egypt, forgetting all the while that they ate that food lacking something far greater: their freedom.

When we read the story of how the Hebrews couldn’t see past their empty stomachs, we should be able to immediately recognize ourselves. We have problems understanding what it is we really need; the problem of seeing the world through the lens of what we don’t have is not new. You and I live in a world where we have no framework for knowing what we need, what we have is too overwhelmingly vast that it obscures our vision. So I wonder, what do we really need?

In 1943 American psychologist Abraham Maslow wrote a paper called “A Theory of Human Motivation” in which he presented his famous hierarchy of needs. It’s basic psychology, I had to learn it in college. There are five levels of his hierarchy:

* *physiological, our basic physical needs food, water, and air,*
* *safety, an environment where we are protected, clothing, shelter, and feel secure*
* *love/belonging, an atmosphere where we feel a connection to others*
* *esteem, a confidence or a caring about our self, how we feel about ourself*
* *and self-actualization, the ability we have to become the best version of ourself.*

Basically, the theory is that human beings will work hard to meet basic needs first and, as they take care of things like hunger, thirst, shelter, etc., the landscape of what they need changes. It shifts to next-level needs like belonging and love. Maslow may have been right, but for you and me, right now, trying to get a picture of what we need is like peering into a warped mirror. Everything is distorted, so much so that we sometimes don’t see everything that we have because we are so mesmerized by the illusion of what we think we need.

As I prepared this week, I came across the story of Oseola McCarty; somebody who could see clearly what she needed. In 1995 she contacted and donated $150,000 to University of Southern Mississippi; maybe you remember the story. Oseola had a 6th grade education, dropping out of school after 6th grade to take care of her Aunt. She lived in the home she would inherit from her uncle; she worked washing and folding clothes for others, as her mother and grandmother did. A meager living at best. But she got in the habit of saving a portion back from everything she earned.

She began to accumulate so much money, the bank thought that she should consider financial planning. What would happen to these funds upon her death? And, so they helped her to make plans for this disbursement. She dedicated 20% of her wealth to her church; 2x a tithe that is required of God. She placed 20% of her wealth in a trust for her living heirs, she took care of her family. And the final 60% of her wealth donated to the University to be used as scholarship money; for students who were not financially able to pay tuition; with minority students getting first option at the scholarship. She took care of her community.

When the school suggested she purchase an auto for transportation she refused. She would push a shopping cart almost a mile to get groceries. She walked everywhere she went; she had no need for a car. When they suggested other purchases, she saw them as luxuries that she did not need. They practically made her purchase two air conditioners for her home. When somebody would suggest a purchase, she would respond, “Why would I do that, I already have everything that I need.” Her life’s work was to meet her needs, serve the church, and serve her friends.

How difficult is it for us to see the world with the same eyes as someone like Oseola McCarty. Many times, instead of noticing the abundance we have, it’s the illusion of what we need that catches our attention. And what happens then? Well, the same thing that happened to the Hebrews. We spend our lives striving for what we feel we need, we create a disparity; us against them. After all, to get what we feel we need, we’ll have to either take from somebody else who has it or rebel against those who keep it from us.

You see this, in the movements of our society today. Protestors who feel entitled to what others have worked hard to attain. Jealous of those who have, because they have not. In some cases, because of social injustice; but in other cases, because they chose not to do the hard work required to attain it. For us here in Bedford county, we do not see the injustice that lies in the urban areas and larger cities. We do not see the discrimination and injustice that minorities face in these areas. But just because we do not see it does not mean that it does not exist.

Likewise, those who are in these blighted areas who declare every Caucasian benefits from white privilege; is not able to see the work and sweat of the brough that is necessary to attain what we have and desire. They do not see the student loan debts that we carry, debts of thousands and thousands of dollars, so we and our children can attain a job that pays a wage over the poverty limit.

You and I spend a lot of time thinking about what we don’t have: enough money, enough friends, a job that fulfills us, good kids, enough retirement, family relationships we long for. Sometimes we’re just exactly like the Hebrews, who looked out over the desert of Sinai and wondered what on earth was ahead for them.

How would our lives change? How would our view of the world be altered, if we were somehow miraculously able to see the world through the eyes of God’s gracious provision, facing the future with confidence because we’ve lived day after day after day, recipients of God’s tender loving care; enough to meet our needs and sustain us again and again and again?

Moses’ brother, Aaron told them what God planned to do; the people “looked toward the wilderness.” They must have been thinking so much about the uncertainties that were ahead of them. And then, the text reads, “and the glory of the Lord appeared on the cloud.” A pillar of cloud spread out before them, God’s presence and leadership into whatever was ahead. And those of them who were able to see it kept right on marching, into the unknown, toward the promise. Why? Because they had been recipients of God’s provision; food when they were hungry, day after day after day.

And when they were finally able to see their lives with recognition of the vast goodness they had, then what God had hoped to accomplish all along began to happen: they could finally see clearly who it was who was the source of their very lives: Almighty God.

God will always provide what we need, even when we don’t know what it is we need. And our daily bread, the sustenance that fills our lives day after day after day it’s enough. Enough and more than enough. We as a society have been given so much. We as a church have been truly blessed. We as individuals have been provided the means to live in this place and the ability to do so much for the kingdom of God.

Let us look less at the desires and things we think we need; and begin to look at the world we live in through the eyes of God’s gracious provision. Identifying where the Lord would like us to do something; to be the hands and feet of our Lord Jesus Christ, working to feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, clothe the naked, and minister to those who are seeking a world where they can belong.