

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

MANNA IN THE WILDERNESS

Exodus 16:2-4, 9-15

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Analysis by Peter Keyel

2The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. 3The 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."

4Then 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.

9Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, 'Draw near to the Lord, for he has heard your complaining.'" 10And 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. 11The 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.'"

13In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. 14When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. 15When

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."

DIAGNOSIS: Stuck in the Wilderness

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Complaining*

Although these stories generally present the Israelites as a bunch of whiners, looking more deeply, the Israelites do have a point. They're stuck out in the wilderness with no food, after God dragged them outside of their comfort zone. That comfort zone was not pleasant—the slavery they endured before was horrible—but it is more appealing than this awful hunger of the present in the middle of a nowhere wilderness. And really, shouldn't we be sympathetic to the Israelites? After all, they are lost and starving, and that justifies some degree of complaining. How else would God or Moses know there was a problem?

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Lack of Trust*

The deeper problem here is not the hunger, but the lack of trust in God. As soon as the going gets tough, the Israelites panic. Surely a good God would never let his people go hungry. Again, they have a legitimate reason to not trust God. God is letting them down. God brought them out to freedom, apparently just to die. This isn't the deal that was promised, and instead it looks like God is going to give them the deal the charioteers pursuing them got or worse.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Starving*

In some ways, it is this knowledge of what is on the line and what God could do that spurs both the lack of trust and the complaining. Starvation is a life or death issue, and it appears that God has chosen death. If God has stuck them in the

wilderness to die, is there really anything else they can do except complain before they die?

PROGNOSIS: The Glory of the Lord Appeared

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Manna*

However, God himself brings life-giving manna to the complaining and untrusting Israelites, after coming in a cloud. Later, God will not stay in that cloud, but come down to earth to fully share and take on our suffering. God does this as Jesus of Nazareth, our Bread of Life, who is crucified and dies in the wilderness called Golgotha. Like the Israelites of the past, we find the glory of the LORD in the wilderness (v. 10), but this time in Jesus's resurrection. Jesus's resurrection is the full glory of the LORD in the wilderness; definitively showing us that death by starvation or otherwise is not the end for us: The good news is that God does not choose death, but instead chooses life, even for sinners like the Israelites (and us).

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Trusting*

God gives manna here, which presages our Bread of Life who will be given centuries later. It is in the giving of this Bread of Life that we know Jesus as LORD. Just as Moses was told in the "morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God" (v. 12), so too do we know God through God's life-giving Bread, Jesus. This Bread fills us so that we do not fear God's absence. No longer do we hunger for various gods or otherwise worry about starvation; we now trust in God.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Witnessing*

Filled with this new bread and the trust it brings, we can no longer complain, despite our situation. Instead, we witness to the new life that God has given us in the Bread. We are empowered to go forth, sharing not only this same Bread of Life in Communion with our siblings, but also sharing other life-

giving breads to those siblings who hunger and thirst.