

SERMON

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Share God's Love!

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Exodus 16: 2-18

One of my favorite stories is one by Judi and Ron Barrett called Cloudy With A Chance of Meatballs – it tells the story of a town not unlike Ayr. There was a main street lined with houses, stores, and trees. A school house. And a growing population. But the difference between the two was that in the town called 'Chew and swallow', you never had to buy ANY food. You see it never rained rain; it never snowed snow; the wind never blew just wind. Instead it rained things like soup and juice. It snowed mashed potatoes and green peas. And sometimes the wind blew in storms of hamburgers.

(show photo of hamburgers)

The people could watch the weather report on television in the morning and they would hear a prediction for the next day's food. The menu always varied. It would be something like ... "Today, after a brief shower of orange juice, low clouds of sunny-side up eggs will move in, followed by pieces of toast. Butter and jelly will sprinkle down throughout the day, and there will be a constant drizzle of milk."

(show photo of toast tree)

It almost sounds as crazy as our unpredictable weather forecasts. But even with our freak hurricanes, we probably won't hear anything as crazy as this:

"Tonight, in 'Chew and swallow', dinner will consist of lamb chops blown in from the East, becoming heavy at times, with occasional ketchup, followed by periods of peas and baked potatoes and ending the day with a gradual clearing and a wonderful Jell-O setting in the west."

(Show photo of Jell-O)

But, the story goes on to tell how terrible things begin to happen in the town. The food becomes unpredictable and the headline of the 'Chew and swallow' Digest reads "Spaghetti Ties Up Town"

(show photo of newspaper)

The people of 'Chew and swallow' begin to grumble and complain. Life was not as good as they wanted it to be, and they wanted answers from the Sanitation department!

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It's a fantastical story – and you'll have to read the rest of the book, perhaps to your children or grandchildren, to find out what happens next. But the story of food raining from the sky in

‘Chew and swallow’ is somewhat similar to the mythical story that we read in Exodus. We hear an account of a grumbling complaining crowd, and a story of quails and bread falling from the sky. It’s a story full of divine magic, of unexplainable fantastical events - just like the parting of the red sea last week. But, it **is, just a story.**

There are many scholarly debates over when, and how, and if, the Israelites ever left Egypt en masse, . The current consensus is that the stories we read today in Exodus are based on national legend that were passed down to the Israelites to explain their national origins. We can not begin to understand and believe that quails and bread literally dropped from the sky, anymore than we can believe the story of ‘Chew and swallow’. Perhaps the most useful way to think of this story is as a blend of myth and history; a way for Israel to express her historical origins in mythic terms.

I know that this might turn your thinking of the bible upside down. But it doesn’t mean that we have nothing to learn from the story. Jesus spoke in parabolic stories all the time to teach his message. And the stories in Exodus have a message for us today. Last week we heard about the message to ‘Trust God’, even in difficult situations. Elsewhere in the Exodus story, we hear about the need to ‘Obey God’ through the actions of Moses. In the weeks ahead we will be looking at how the Exodus stories teach us to ‘Talk to God’. But today, this story teaches us to quit grumbling and to Share God.

The Exodus story today begins with the Israelites sitting around grumbling and complaining. If you read the Exodus story of the desert wanderings, you will see that this is actually a common thing for them to do. Just after they had escaped the slave pits of Egypt, camping by the Red Sea, they began their "grumbling" against Moses and Aaron. Almost as soon as the echo of Miriam's loud song of victory ceased resounding (in Exodus 15), the Israelites turned from being a choir to a mob, complaining and demanding water from Moses:

"the people grumbled against Moses, saying, 'What are we to drink?'" (Ex. 15:24).

And even though God provides them with water, their satisfaction with the provision ends all too soon, and here we see the grumbling crowd is at it again, demanding food. In fact, whenever the going got tough, whenever they faced a crisis – they complained to Moses. But in reality, they were actually grumbling against God; and in Exodus 16:8 Moses calls them on it saying:

"You are not grumbling against me, but against the Lord." (Exodus 16:8b)

The Isrealites forgot all the ways in which God had blessed them. They forgot all the ways in which God had answered their prayers and cries for help. They even looked back on their past life in slavery with rose tinted glasses saying:

"There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food that we wanted." (16:3)

What a pathetic whiny bunch! What a story they tell themselves. The truth was that many of them had lived in Egypt under severe conditions and close to starvation.

I think we're a bit like that too aren't we. As a church, we look back on our past as the "good old days" when our pews were all filled, when there were so many people that we spread out into the balcony, when there were so many children that we had use all the classrooms that we now use as storage rooms. And we grumble and complain that things have changed, asking Where are the people now? Why aren't things the way they used to be? And when we grumble, we are very quick to forget the ways that God is blessing us today!

But what is God's response to this complaining mob? What is God's response to us when we grumble? Does God just ignore them saying "Quit your complaining?" Well here's the best part of the story –

No! God does **not** ignore the Israelites complaining – God provides for them repeatedly. It would be so easy for God to teach them a lesson to toughen up, but instead, God teaches them a lesson in Grace. The story teaches us that when the Israelites needed an escape route, God parted the Red Sea. When they were thirsty, God turned bitter water into pure drinking water. And now, when they were hungry, God rained down quails and bread. It's a fantastical story, but the message is clear. God's grace provides.

And what should our response be? What does God ask of us in return. Well again the ancient story has a lot to teach us today. It is clear that God asks the Israelites to share the blessings that God gives them. They are told to take just as much as they need. Not as much as they want, but as much as **they need**. It is a message that we hear Jesus preach many times in the New Testament. And it's a very clear lesson for us today!

We live in a world where there is extreme poverty, extreme hunger, where many live without clean water, where homeless shelters are overflowing, and where food banks are a reality for survival to many. God is not asking us to live in poverty ourselves – no, God is promising that God will provide for us. But in this ancient story, God is telling us that we must share the blessings that God gives us and not keep things to ourselves. In our world today, our resources are divided unfairly among those of us who have full access to the goods and services of this world, and those who do not. We luxuriate, while so many of our fellow humans' struggle for their daily bread, if they can find any at all. God does not want us to live with such inequality and injustice. And if you read on in our story today, you will see that when the Israelites tried to take more than they needed, and tried to save the food overnight, it became full of maggots and began to smell – perhaps that is to remind them to share the blessings that God is giving them.

And how can we share God's blessings? Well, in weekly offerings when we give to mission and service, we are sharing; when we bring in the canned soups and stews for the foodbank, we are sharing; when we donate to the Thanksgiving Food Drive for Neighbors Helping Neighbors, we

are sharing. But we are also sharing when we take time to stop during our busy days and share our time with someone who needs to talk; we are sharing when we visit someone who is lonely or sick. We are sharing when we advocate for justice and equality so that God's blessings can be received by everyone. There are so many ways that we can share God's love with others.

This story from Exodus, like the story of 'Chew and swallow', is a fantastical mythical narrative. But, do not let the strange imagery stop you from hearing God's message. God is reminding us to stop complaining, to remember how blessed we are by the grace of God, and to share God's blessing with others in all the ways that we can. Amen.