

*Exodus 16:1-15 Daily Bread Daily Trust.....Sunday September 20<sup>th</sup> 2026*  
*A collaborative Sermon written by Nora Vedress (personalized by Jennifer Irving)*

I know you all have been back in the Sanctuary worshiping for a couple of weeks already but for me, I've been out of this beautiful, hallowed space for far too long! I wasn't exiled to Egypt or anything quite so dramatic but I have to say, I'm glad to be on this side of the Red Sea with the Israelites as we pick up the Exodus story! The summer apart has been washed away and we can spend a few moments rejoicing like the Israelites did, reveling in our reunion just as they reveled in their newly acquired freedom. Given the list of committees meeting this week, the reality that we have places to go and things to accomplish this year! It doesn't take long, for Mose's people to realize that they cannot stay where they are either. A journey now lies ahead of them and it's time for them to get moving. I imagine the adrenaline high lasted for a few days making the first steps into the wilderness a bit exciting, adventure like. But the truth is those Israelites had no idea how rough it was going to get, and how quickly things would begin to unravel.

By the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the second month after leaving Egypt, they are sore, tired, hungry, irritable...more than irritable, they are angry... worse than angry, they're HANGRY. Now you may think, I dunno 45 days of wandering about in the desert would make me upset as well...keep in mind this is 6 weeks into a 40 *year* journey. Six weeks in—and all they keep thinking about is how things had been before. Forgetting, it would seem, the slavery part—and remembering only the food. Which makes sense, they're starving, and when you're starving you tend to think of the last time you ate.

"If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, they lament, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread;" (Exodus 16:3a). Six weeks in and they are so overwhelmed they would choose death by Pharaoh in Egypt over death by hunger in the wilderness.

Now this is hardly the first time this particular group of people have complained. They complained before they crossed the sea, the complained three days into the journey when they didn't like the taste of the water...and each time Moses seems to sigh as he goes to ask God what to do about them. While my first reaction to all of this is to be judgmental pointing out that the people shouldn't be complaining so much, after all they'd just been rescued *by God* who is offering a *pillar of fire and smoke* to guide them (subtlety is NOT God's vibe here) I have to tell you, I kind of like it. I like that they have no issue voicing their malcontentedness (*is that a word?*). I like that they are overly dramatic. I like that they don't hold their tongues, as they throw their hands up in desperation. At least we know they're being honest. And isn't that a healthy place to be? No point pretending like everything is awesome when it's not. Psychology Today Magazine says that "there are several positive outcomes to complaining. It may foster a sense of validation in the individual. Complaining, like all communication, may bring a sense of connectedness between individuals. Additionally, venting makes one feel better. Letting out a negative experience certainly feels better than keeping it in... Sometimes...just venting allows an external perspective, and is self-monitoring, indicating that what one is complaining about needn't bother them so." (The Psychology of Complaining William Berry in Psychology Today).

This is a good reminder to me (and maybe you too), because I think often times we think complaining doesn't get us anywhere and that it is inherently bad. And even worse, we don't give ourselves or others permission to gripe and groan and we try to skip over to some "silver lining". We start to believe the pain and suffering gets in the way of our faith and if we just ignore it we will experience more joy.

It's possible, then, that this sermon would be good enough where it simply to reassure us that we're not alone in our griping nor denied "People of God" status when we get petulant—that we are allowed to be upset when things are going wrong.

I find this comforting because the reality is, I'm a pro at noticing things that are going wrong and despite all my attempts to practice gratitude, I have mastered the art of throwing a pity party. Just ask me what I was doing while I waited 8 hours in the Soldier's Memorial Hospital on Labour Day Sunday into Monday. Not to mention when the doctor confirmed Tuesday morning (when I was supposed be back at work, I might add) that I did indeed have a Deep Vein Thrombosis in my leg and recommended I get a CT scan since I was having symptoms that might indicate there were blood clots in my lungs too (and then when those clots were confirmed). So much for hitting the ground running—I wasn't even sure if I could limp back. I felt like I had every right to throw my hands in the air in desperation. And I don't know if you want to know what came out of my mouth when I got the call about one of our beloved church members dying and then heard the news that another had been diagnosed with cancer. And that's not even mentioning Neelah and her Grade 12 schedule being so messed up she might not be able to get into the University program she's had her heart set on.

I can think of a lot of reasons to just step out of this pulpit and stomp my feet and scream. And, in those moments it doesn't really help to remind me of all that is right with the world, or tell me to look on the bright side, or worst of all, gently extol how things could be worse. And, if my pity party doesn't have comfort food at it, well, let's just say me and the Israelites are cut from the same cloth, wandering about the wilderness tummies grumbling as I wail about the unfairness of it all.

So, what a comfort to read what comes after all this complaining in our story from Exodus. Moses, receives their tantrum, seems to sigh, and does what he always does when his crew of wanderers get on a rant spiral...he makes his way to God.

But this time God sees Moses coming and, rather than waiting to be asked what should be done, beats Moses to the punch and responds in the most God like way ever. Those bitter, angry, hungry Israelites are not calmed by the Holy One with smiting or disowning or reprimanding or punishing. They are calmed with feeding!

Bread and quail, morning and night. And let's be clear here, they were not wishing for some sort of spiritual or metaphorical support from God, they were hungry and wanted food. And that's exactly what God gave them. A miraculous intervention. I don't even need to know if it was a "real" miracle or have the existence of edible dew and the migration practices of prairie chickens in the Middle East explained to me. I'm happy to just accept what was offered and hold fast to the hope it gives me that even while they were in the wilderness, starving and complaining, they were blessed by a God who loved them.

I'm happy with this because I believe it is the same for us.

Time and time again I look back and I see where God was moving in the wilderness moments of my life. I see the person who brought the flowers, or who baked the chocolate zucchini brownies, or who saw my whiny text and sent me the perfect meme that made me respond with the laughing til the tears ran emoji.

Maybe we're not eating magical bread off our lawns in the morning, but I suspect you have had situations that have turned up out of the blue that have sustained you too. Maybe it was a dragonfly, or a dime, or song, or word, or a rainbow, that arrived right when you needed it calming your spirit and sustaining you for one minute of one more day. Divinely offered sustenance, manna that will see us through.

I know there are a lot of people in here, joining us online, reading this sermon at home, who are in the middle of crossing a wilderness of your own. And I know that one of the hardest parts about these wilderness times is how desolate they are. We are parched, lost, afraid, doubt-filled. We become hopeless, fearful. The wilderness moments of life lend for some pretty barren real estate. I also have come to know that to survive these times we have to start relying on something bigger than ourselves. We have to start trusting that God hears our cries, and our complaints, and will offer us what we need to get through today.

And that makes me think of another interesting thing about the bread and the quail. It's how it all came in one day portions. None of it could be stockpiled or hoarded—I mean, they tried to do that, of course they did, humans will be human—but none of it kept. Those people, they all had to learn to rely on God, one day at a time.

They had to get to place where they trusted that God was going to provide what they needed to get through the next step.

Frustratingly God never said “hey here's my five year plan, here's a map for the journey, a little gps system in case you get lost, and here's a written guarantee that all will be well”. Wouldn't life be grand if *that's* how it went!

God didn't do that then, doesn't do it now, God just said “here's food for today”. And like the crossing of the red sea last week this one is so important to our faith story that Jesus himself wove into our most beloved prayer “give us this day our daily bread”

I always thought that the word Manna meant bread from heaven...anyone else with me on that? Turns out the word in Hebrew means “What is it?” When the people woke they saw a layer of dew around the camp and when it evaporated it left a flakey frost like substance on the ground. The people looked at it and then each other and said “manna” – “What is it?”.

I wonder if that's the question we hold onto today too: “What is it?”

What is it that points to God's providing, abiding, presence in our lives today?

It will be different for each of us but the source of it will be the same.

As we go into this week, even in the midst of our complaining, our hard moments, our wilderness, may we notice the beauty—may we search for the things that feed our souls—may we find that which gives us the strength to keep journeying through the wilderness.

May we recognize our “what is it?” as gifts from God and give thanks. Amen.