

Find Your Manna

Rev. John Allen

Not long after they have escaped from Pharaoh's army, through the parted waters of the Red Sea, the complaining starts up.

And let's not be too hard on God's people here. It's not like they are complaining about discomfort, or a lack of luxury.

They are looking for food. And water.

No matter how bad their life in Egypt had been, facing into the barren and unforgiving desert, they are having second thoughts.

And so the people complain and grumble, and wonder. Would we have been better off if we had just stayed in Egypt?

We find ourselves now in something of a wilderness. No matter how long we live with the reality of this pandemic, there is something still fundamentally disorienting about it.

Add to that all that looms in our social consciousness. Unrest. Militias. Polarization. Reckoning. Awakening. Fear. Uncertainty. Grief.

We are in the wilderness. And there is bound to be some grumbling.

And let's not be too hard on ourselves either. Sure all of us might find we grumble about petty inconveniences from time to time.

Yet plenty of what we find our hearts aching for in this moment is as essential as bread and water. Connection. Hope. Beauty. Joy.

We are often tempted to stifle our grumbles. To belittle the longings of our own heart. To chastise ourselves inwardly for wanting anything for ourselves.

But one thing we see in today's story, is that God is an appropriate audience for complaints. The people complain. And God hears.

And God is not upset at their complaints. God does not chastise them, or belittle their need. God receives their complaints as the prayers that they are. God hears the longings that they hold.

I am going to ask you to do two things this morning. And the first is to complain.

Find the boldness to complain openly. At least to God. If not also to someone else you know, love, and trust. Or even call me.

Push through any need you feel to stifle our couch what your heart is longing for. Give it a name. Give it voice.

Name your weariness. Your loneliness. Your frustration.

Name what has hurt you. Name your grief. Say how sad you were to miss that event. Admit how much you miss that person.

It matters. What you are going through matters. It matters to those who love you. It is worth saying out loud. It is worth lifting up to God.

—

Here is how God responded to the complaints of the Israelites. God sent a strange substance. As fine as the morning dew. Sweet. Delicate. Good to eat.

The people called it “manna.” Which is simply how you say “what is this?” in Hebrew.

This manna fed the people. Sated their hunger. Gave them strength for the day’s journey. Sustained them in their wandering. It let their children grow.

And it was strange stuff. No matter how much you picked up, by the time you got back to your tent there was just enough to feed everyone there. No more. No less.

And if you tried to hoard it or hide it away, (which naturally people did) it grew foul.

And by midday, what was left on the surface, melted away, like that little coating of overnight snow that has already melted off the driveway by the time you leave for work.

This was the substance by which God sustained the people.

All they needed. Nothing more. Nothing less. Impossible to commodify or hoard.

Abundantly meeting every need. Impervious to greed.

—

The second thing I am going to ask you to do today is to find your manna.

What in your life is sustaining you today? What grace descends upon your morning as gentle and delicate as dew, to nourish what you hunger for, to sustain you through the challenges you face, to prepare you for the journey, to enable you to grow?

It is likely something as simple as a call from a friend. A smile from a neighbor. A love you share. The simple presence of a beloved pet.

Or it might come to you in even less tangible form. Gratitude for the very gift of living. The knowledge of your belovedness in the eyes of God.

God’s substance in the wilderness did not come as a flash of light, a dramatic change of course, or a sudden windfall.

It did not make everything ok at once. It did not take their hunger away for good.

God substance in the wilderness came as something surprising and simple. Just enough for today. Just what you need. Nothing more. Nothing less.

Tomorrow, you will awake hungry again and once more rely on God’s grace as you did today. There is nothing on earth you can store up that will satisfy the same way as the simple, daily bread, of God’s love.

So what is your manna? What simple grace will sustain you today.

—

But please don't skip over the complaining part. Please do not miss this opportunity to name the simple needs of your body, the simple longings of your heart.

For if you are not able to notice the grumblings of your heart. You may struggle to notice the simple grace that God has set out before you in the gentle morning light.

—

We are living in a moment of high stress, of high anxiety. Its everywhere. It is all around us. We are carrying it in our own bodies. Shoulders constantly pulled up a bit toward our ears. Jaws tight.

It is hard to notice simple things when we are stressed. It is hard to let our eyes fall to the earth to be surprised by some surprising sustaining grace. It is hard to summon the courage to actually open our own hearts to see what sort of grief and fear they are carrying.

Perhaps as long as we are in this wilderness, you might try this.

When you feel the stress rising. When you feel like you are at the end of your rope. When you feel like throwing up your hands. Or falling to the ground in tears.

Stop. Take a breath. And lift your honest complaints to God. Don't settle for the surface. The messy house, the hectic schedule, cascading notifications, the bags under your eyes. Keep complaining, and eventually you will reach the heart of the matter. The grief and longing that lies within you beneath it all. Lift that to God.

Then look to see your manna.

Ask yourself what simple grace is sustaining you today. Not solving your problems, but sustaining you enough to meet them, not for a month, or a week, but for today.

What simple grace is sustaining you today.

Find your manna. Find your manna. Find your manna.