

Tenth Weekend After Pentecost (RCL/B): "Tesla's, Manna and Gatorade"
Exodus 16:2-4, 9-15; Psalm 78:23-29; Ephesians 4:1-16; John 6:24-35
July 31/Aug. 1, 2021
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

I was recently talking with a friend who owns a Tesla, asking how he knows where to find Tesla charging stations elsewhere. He explained that his navigation system identifies the location of all charging stations, including how many docks each one has and how many are in use. Pretty cool. When he and his wife travel, they carefully plot a route that will enable them to keep the car charged, reach their destination and make it all the way home again. Their car is dependent on electricity, so they make sure it gets what it needs to take them where they want to go!

The Israelites in today's story from Exodus are dependent on God's mercy, on God meeting all their needs during the wilderness journey, leading from Egypt where they'd been enslaved, to the Promised Land. The desert in which they currently find themselves is definitely **not** flowing with milk and honey. They're only about 6 weeks out from the Exodus from Egypt; the food supplies they'd escaped with are now used up. They're in the middle of nowhere, so they can't trade what they **do** have for food, which they **don't** have. They have brought their flocks and herds along with them, but the point is to make a living once they complete their journey, so they're not looking to slaughter their cows or sheep along the way. They're passing through a harsh, unforgiving, barren land, without a lot of grazing opportunities, so that has probably already culled their flocks.

The people are so hungry they're frightened they might eventually **die** of hunger or thirst. They are "hangry," and they figure it's a lot safer to take out their anger on Moses and his brother Aaron rather than directly on God. In only 6 weeks on the lam, their memory of the horrors of slavery in Egypt have morphed into memories of steaming, savory lamb stew and warm pita bread.... "Did you bring us out here to kill us of hunger or what???" (Exodus 16:3)

The Lord overhears this conversation and basically says: [hold up sign:] STOP WHINING!

*God spoke to Moses, "I've listened to the complaints of the Israelites. Now tell them: 'At dusk you will eat meat and at dawn you'll eat your fill of bread; and you'll realize that I am GOD, **your** God.'" (Exodus 16:11-12, *The Message*)*

The meat will come from flocks of quail and the bread will be manna, which definitely doesn't look like loaves of Wonderbread, but like frost on the ground every morning. The first time it shows up, the Israelites' less-than-gracious response is: "What IS it?" (Exodus 16:15) "Bread from heaven," God called it (Exodus 16:4). And in this weekend's assigned psalm, Psalm 78 (v. 25), it's called "the bread of angels." In Latin that's *panis angelicus*, the name of a beautiful classical hymn stanza written by Thomas Aquinas, referring to Holy Communion. Today's Gospel tells us how manna and Eucharist are related: Jesus is "*the true bread from heaven*" (John 6:32).

We can go in a lot of different directions from there, which is a good thing because we're in a 5 week cycle about Jesus as the Bread of Life ☺. Right now I'm thinking of the interesting detail that the wilderness manna arrived fresh each morning, like the Lord's mercies that we hear about in Lamentations 3:

*²² The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;
²³ they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.*

The Lord who created us knows us well, knows we're perennially afraid, "There won't be enough!" So the Lord tells Moses to warn the people NOT to stockpile the manna, NOT to stick it in their pockets, NOT to stuff it into their knapsacks. Instead they are to trust that there will be a new shipment each day, same-day-fresh like Joe Leone's bread. Of course, some of the people JUST CAN'T TRUST, JUST CAN'T OBEY, so they squirrel away today's manna for tomorrow and the next day find that it's crawling with worms. (We don't know whether or not the Lord said, "I told you so....")

Our heavenly Father wants the children of Israel to trust that He's going to show up for them each day of their journey. (Thankfully they are blissfully unaware on the front end that their trek to the Promised Land will take 40 years.) **"Trust Me to rain down more manna tomorrow. Depend on Me to be faithful. Be interdependent with one another and dependent on Me. Your dependence on Me isn't a sign of weakness. It's a sign of spiritual strength."**

Our heavenly Father wants **us** to trust that He's going to show up for **us** each day of our lives. (We have no idea either how long the journey will take, do we?) **"Trust Me to answer your prayer for daily bread. Depend on Me to be faithful. Be interdependent with one another and dependent on Me. Your dependence on Me isn't a sign of weakness. It's a sign of spiritual strength. I'll give you daily bread, grace for the day, as you need it."**

But Lord, I'd feel better, less anxious, if You'd give me a lot of grace, a lot of wisdom, a lot of courage, a lot of inspiration, all at once. Then I'll know I have it in reserve when the need arises. "Right, but then you wouldn't really be dependent on Me, would you? You wouldn't necessarily look toward me, because you'd already have what you need, and to be honest, sometimes you relate to Me like a djinni in a bottle, right?"

There's a story in Corrie Ten Boom's classic, *The Hiding Place*, about how as a child she became aware of and frightened that one day her beloved father would die. When she tearfully confessed this fear:

Father sat down on the edge of the narrow bed. "Corrie," he began gently, "when you and I go to Amsterdam – when do I give you your ticket?"

I sniffed a few times, considering this.

"Why, just before we get on the train."

"Exactly. And our wise Father in heaven knows when we're going to need things, too. Don't run out ahead of Him, Corrie. When the time comes..., you will look into your heart and find the strength you need – just in time."¹

In later years and in difficult circumstances (i.e., a concentration camp), Corrie and her sister Betsy remembered that story and realized our Father in heaven is like that, too. Whatever we need: courage, wisdom, strength, humility, inspiration, willingness to forgive or to be forgiven, will be given to us in the exact moment we need it. We can trust our heavenly Parent to provide what we need, when we need it. How much less anxious, less fearful, we'd be, if we could trust this truth more completely.

“Fill me up, Lord!” Worship is our spiritual filling station. Through Word, through Sacrament, through our faith family, God recharges our spirits and energizes us for our holy work in this world. Like our friend with the Tesla, we are wise to chart our course through life making sure that we include regular stops to recharge our spiritual batteries so we don't run out of spiritual gas along the Way. Another example: last week I saw a woman pop out of a car and stand 2 bottles of Gatorade at the foot of the oak tree on our front lawn. I asked why and she explained she was going on a 12 mile run and was dropping off liquid for hydration along her route.

Worship is one of the big priorities we schedule before lesser commitments. There's no substitute for Word, Sacrament, and the community of faith. I know I'm “preaching to the choir” ☺: if you're listening to me, you're present in person when you could be on the beach a mile and a half away, or you're present virtually in the heart of summer, when many distractions beckon. This is a wild change of metaphor, but we are all like ET, phoning home in worship. Know that Someone IS on the receiving end, and WILL send daily bread, in all its forms. Our part is to trust it is so, and to plot a course that allows us to stay spiritually charged along the Way. Amen

¹Corrie ten Boom, with John and Elizabeth Sherrill, *The Hiding Place* (NY: Bantam, 1971), p. 29.

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