

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

East Moline, Illinois

Pastor Becky Sherwood

**September 20, 2020, The 9<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Pentecost/The 18<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time**

Phil 1:21-30, Exodus 16:2-15

**ENOUGH IS ENOUGH...FOR NOW**

How much is enough?  
 How much is too much?  
 Too much of a good thing is wonderful.  
 Too much is never enough.  
 When is enough, enough?

You may think these are modern phrases, but if you'd been wandering in the Sinai Desert over 3700 years ago you might have heard these exact words. (Well not in English, but you get the idea) Because our ancestors in the faith, those wandering and whining-in-the-wilderness Israelites said "this is not enough," over and over again.

When you hear the story of our Israelite mothers and fathers in the faith at this point in their journey to the Promised Land, it is easy to feel a bit smug. After all that God had done for them, they just keep on whining in the wilderness.

Two and half months before this, these people had been slaves in Egypt. They worked sun-up to sun-down for the Pharaoh. They were the descendants of their fathers and mothers of faith: Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Jacob and Rachel and Leah. But history and circumstances had conspired against them and they ended up trapped in the land of Egypt, slaves to the generations of Pharaohs. It had been 400 years since their ancestor Joseph had been a favorite of the Pharaoh's. 400 years of slavery.

The New Oxford Annotated Bible, NRSV, New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, p.70, note for Exodus 1:6.

But then one of their own people, Moses, was called by God, speaking to him from a burning bush, to stand up to Pharaoh and demand the release of all the Israelite people. Then they saw first-hand the plagues that God rained down on Egypt, until finally Pharaoh let them go.

But then Pharaoh changed his mind about losing all his slaves and gave chase. As the Israelites were pushed up against the Red Sea by the armies of Egypt, they witnessed another miracle. Moses raised up his staff, stretched his hand out over the sea, and it parted. The people of Israel walked through the Sea on dry land. They all crossed safely, and then the waters of the Sea returned, destroying their enemies.

Then God began to lead the Israelites through the wilderness. God helped them so they could travel day and night. During the day God led them by a huge pillar of cloud that everyone could see. At night there was a pillar of fire that lit the night sky and guided them forward.

But then two and half months passed, and they were still wandering through the wilderness. So, the Israelites began to complain. Now in fairness to them, they were in the desert wilderness, and didn't know where they were going. (It sounds familiar, doesn't it?!) But for poor Moses and his brother Aaron, it was even worse than driving with tired children in the car:

"Are we there yet?" "I'm bored." "When will this trip be over?" "He's touching me."  
 "She's looking out my window." "Are we there yet?"

The Israelites harassed Aaron and Moses in the same tone of voice. But remember, there were thousands of them:

“Why did you bring us out here?”

“We would have been better off dead in Egypt than stuck out here.”

“We’re hungry, it was so much better in Egypt; we had meat cooking over the fire there!”

“We’re hungry; we always had bread to eat in Egypt.”

“Did you just bring all of us out here in the wilderness to kill us?”

“Moses, Aaron, are you trying to starve us to death?”

“Are we there yet?”

Their complaining and whining were so bad that they have been memorialized in the Bible for doing it. They complained so much that in four short verses the word “complaining” shows up five times.

And even when God sent them quail and manna, they still whined. We know this because the very first thing they said when they saw the manna was: “What is it?”

We’re back to the tired children again aren’t we: “What is it?” “I’ve never eaten this before.” “What will it taste like?” “What IS it?”

We know they said this because the question “what is it” in Hebrew, the language they were speaking is pronounced, “man hu,” from which we get the English word manna. Not only are they remembered for complaining, but the food God gave them was named for their questioning: “Man hu?” “What IS it?”

So, let’s put this story into further perspective for a minute. They had been slaves. They lived in slave’s housing, they ate slave’s rations, the Pharaoh commanded the midwives to kill each son that was born, the slave drivers used whips, and imprisonment and death as incentives... and they wanted to go back to Egypt???

Not to mention the fact that in the last two and half months they had seen:

God bring 10 plagues down on the people on Egypt.

God had parted the Red Sea and they had walked on dry land in the middle of the Sea.

And every single day God showed up with a pillar of cloud to lead them,

and every single night God showed up with a pillar of fire that lit the night sky.

And they wanted to go back to Egypt??? What were they thinking?

Because of course if that had been us out in the wilderness we would have acted differently! Right?

No matter how scared we were,

no matter how uncertain the future looked to us,

no matter how desolate the desert seemed,

no matter how much we feared for our children’s lives and futures,

we would never have forgotten all the things that God had already done for us,

Right?

If that had been us out there, we might have been a bit hungry, a bit scared, a little concerned for our family, our children and the oldest members of our families who walked beside us,

but we would never have complained like that!

Our story would not be remembered for all that whining! Right?

We wouldn’t have run around asking: “Man hu? Man hu?” Right? Right?

The good news for the Israelites, and for all of us who know wilderness wanderings, is that God writes very different stories than we do.

God goes to Moses and says, “Yes I do hear the Israelites complaining.  
 I hear that they are hungry;  
 I hear that they are scared;  
 I hear that they are concerned for the future,  
 and what is coming next.  
 And I am a God who takes care of my people who are wandering and fearful and scared.  
 Did you notice that God doesn’t scold the Israelites for complaining?  
 God doesn’t punish the Israelites for being scared and asking too many questions.  
 God doesn’t even get mad that with all the miracles they’ve seen  
 in the last two and half months  
 they still can’t trust in God.

No, God does none of these things, because God’s stories are about abundant generosity and unceasing love.

Instead God says, “My people are hungry, so I will feed them.

They are hungry for meat stews so I will blanket the camp with quail each night so there will be meat cooking over their fires as the sun sets.

They are hungry for the bread they ate each morning and carried through the day, so I will coat the camp with bread from heaven.

There will be enough for everyone, every single day.

My people will no longer eat meat and bread from the land of slavery. They will eat meat and bread that comes from my hand.

They will see that I care for them, that I love them,  
 that there is no end to my generosity.

Every day I will remind my people that it is me who hears them.

Every day they will see with their own eyes that I am with them  
 and I am their God of abundant generosity and unceasing love.

God was shaping the people of Israel as they walked through the desert. God was showing them over and over again that they could trust God to provide for them:

the pillar of cloud by day, the pillar of fire at night,  
 quail in the evening and manna in the morning.

God spoke to these chosen people that God loved and said: “I have heard you and I am giving you enough for today. I am giving you enough in this present moment.

So, go out each day and gather just what you need for the day.”

And then God showed them that they could rely on God moment by moment, and day by day, because each morning there was just enough bread for that day, and each night there was just enough quail for that night.

And in gathering the bread and quail day by day, just enough for that day,  
 the people learned that God was their God,

showing up every single day with exactly what they needed.

Every single day,

enough was enough,

because God’s abundant generosity and unceasing love are without end,

day by day.

--See: The New Interpreter's Bible—A Commentary in Twelve Volumes, Vol. I, General & Old Testament Articles, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994, pp. 812-813 God hears, the people will know its Yahweh; they will see that God is in the wilderness. And the idea of it no longer being Egypt's meat and bread.

--The idea of "Inexpressible Generosity" from the Rev. Jim Eaton, First Congregational Church of Albany, NY, Midrash, 9-19-14