

“Feast and Famine”
 Exodus 16:2-15
 September 20, 2020
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Imagine your favorite thing - - something you consider to be really GOOD.

For me it's down to:

apple pie, meeting with an old friend, skiing, poetry, good coffee, and jazz music.

I think it might be DANGEROUS for me if all those things were COMBINED.

So - - what is it for you?

“- - Girls in white dresses with blue satin sashes?

Snowflakes that stay on your nose and eyelashes?

Brown paper packages - - tied up with string . . .”

By the way, John Coltrane’s version of that song is one of MY favorite - - good things.

Anyway - - have you got a picture in your mind of something good?

Now - - ask yourself this: can you ever imagine getting ENOUGH of it?

Remember old Winnie the Pooh - stopping by to visit Rabbit?

While Pooh was there, he ate TOO MUCH honey. / Rabbit was just being hospitable by offering something to eat. But it seems that Pooh does not know - - "when to say when".

You know what I mean?

Pooh fills himself - - with too much of a good thing. Too much honey.

SO - On Pooh's way out, he gets STUCK in the hole which is Rabbit's front door. / Try as they might, Rabbit, and Christopher Robin cannot get Pooh out of his tight spot.

Pooh is stuck.

He just has to wait - - for a week - - stuck - - until he loses the weight on his own.

Sometimes that's all you can do - - when someone is stuck.

You have to just wait - - wait for them to get un-stuck.

And with THAT in mind ask yourself THIS: What is better, FEAST or FAMINE?

If it is possible to get too MUCH of a good thing - -

- - doesn't it stand to reason that it might be good AVIOD it?

IF a FEAST is about GLUTTONY...

Wouldn't FAMINE be preferable?

Or is the answer to the question : "neither".

To the question, what is better, feast or famine, the answer is: NEITHER.

What is preferable - - and better - - is a normal balanced meal.

When the extremes - - no longer satisfy - - maybe balance - - is the answer...?

In C.S.Lewis' story, "The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe", the main character, Edmond, is offered some candy, called "Turkish Delight" - - offered by a wicked witch.

It is delicious candy. / Edmund had never tasted anything better.

The more he ate, the more he wanted, BUT - - he didn't know that the candy was enchanted, and the more he ate - - the harder it would be to stop - - and finally it would KILL him.

Well, in the story, it does NOT kill him. / BECAUSE - he is PROTECTED - - by a queen who won't let him eat too much - - and then by the Lion - - who OFFERS HIMSELF - - - in place of Edmond. / But - - without this PROTECTION - - it would have been a disaster.

AND - when I was young I WONDERED - - why my grandmother kept her cookies in a jar - - HIGH - - on the counter - where only SHE could take them out.

The Old Testament book of Exodus is about God's protection - - of the Hebrew people.

This morning's Scripture reading from Exodus tells us a story of a time when God - - sent the Israelites - something good. / Manna and quail - - to sustain them in the wilderness.

In fact God sends MORE than they need.

And they try to GET too much of it for themselves.

The Israelites - - and Moses - - have been guided through the wilderness - - out of the land of Egypt. / Which IS where they HAD wanted to be all along!

Remember back in chapters 5, 8 and 10 - - what Moses asked for?

Moses asked Pharaoh to let them go so they could FEAST in the wilderness.

But that feast was supposed to be one of sacrifice - - and for God.

It would NOT have been a feast of GLUTTONY.

It would have been one eaten - - as an act of FAITH.

But - - NOW - - they're IN the wilderness - and they're scared. /

They feel abandoned by God. / And instead of continuing to trust in God - - they MURMUR. / They complain. / They say, "We're HUNGRY out here - - and what's more - before you freed us, GOD, we remember having enough to eat.

Good food - - a balanced diet - - back in Egypt - - when we were in slavery.

And God hears their cry and sends Manna.

Manna is a thin bread which comes each morning - - and has to be collected off the leaves and the ground. / But there's a CATCH - - only take what you NEED.

Otherwise it will get ROTTEN.

It won't keep from day to day.

Trust in God EACH DAY.

God's love - and promises - and spirit - - and providence - - these things aren't supposed to be HOARDED from day to day. / God - - isn't something to be STORED up - - so we can go a few days without thinking about God.

Have you ever tried to STORE UP friendship?

It's the same idea.

Do you ever do that with - - your kids - - or parents - - or family members?

Get the weekend phone call made so you can move on...

How about our relationship with God?

Do we trust in God each day?

Or do we try to store our spirituality up from the weekend?

The ISRAELITE'S - - don't want to go day to day - - because they are ANXIOUS.

It makes sense to me.

We live in a world FILLED with ANXIETY right now.

Who really can TRUST that things will be OK day after day?

So what do we do?

We buy WAY TOO MUCH toilet paper!

I'm not sure MANNA has ever been compared to TOILET PAPER...

But maybe it fits.

The Hebrew people have faced a CRISIS - - and they are traumatized.

And SO - - maybe they're AFRAID - - that God won't show up.

It would make sense after all they have been through.

I can relate to the feeling - of wondering if and when God is going to show up.

But - - in the end - - the PROBLEM the Hebrew people have - - is NOT that God DOESN'T SHOW UP - - - the problem is how they respond when God does.

EVEN after God provides - - manna in the wilderness - - quail to eat - - they don't BELIEVE it will LAST. / They are UNSURE. / They have SHAKY faith. / And so they GRAB it up as fast as they can, not believing in tomorrow.

They are - - not able to wait - - or to feel at ease - in their faith.

They struggle to TRUST God.

Is this at all familiar to you - - in your own life?

To complicate matters: did you know - - that manna is not all that GREAT after all?

Manna - - would probably NOT rank - - on anyone's list of favorite things. / Manna really exists. / It can be found in the Sinai desert to this day. / The people there even still call it "man". / And what it IS - - is a secretion from the BUGS that live in the trees of that region.

It is sweet, and FULL of carbohydrates, and VERY edible, and good for you,

and it looks like bread.

But it is basically - - the droppings of bugs.

And people still eat it today - in that region.

But it is pretty everyday stuff.

And it DOES get rotten rather quickly.

BUT - - it is BETTER - - than FAMINE.

The Israelites have been handed a gift by God. / They were provided for. / It was not exactly what they wanted. / They would have preferred the succulent food in the "fleshpots" of Egypt. / But here it is: Manna.

Not a FEAST - - but not FAMINE either.

In their anxiety - they don't believe THAT it will last.

As they gather in the manna - - and hoard it up for the days to come - - I think that part of what is happening - - has MORE to it than simply GREED.

The Israelites - - as they gather the manna - - they are forgetting about the STRUGGLE that God called them to. / They are seeking comfort - - and safety - - and something RELIABLE in a SCARY world.

AND while doing that - - they are forgetting about God.

They're basically saying:

"God - this isn't working - we were better off in slavery."

But - - I guess the REAL question for all of us is this:

Which is better - - -

- - - freedom from physical hunger - - -

- - - or freedom to follow God's lead - and become who God created us to be?

Even if it means eating manna once in a while - - or wandering in the wilderness?

Think of what you are AFRAID of.

Crime - - people you don't understand - - poverty - - the big evil scary world.

Your own neighbors?

How about fear of INJUSTICE - - and MEANNESS - - and RACISM?

We're all afraid of each other - - - but is anyone - - still afraid of GOD anymore?

Could ANYTHING - - put the fear of God back into us?

What would it take to return to RESPECT?

Decency?

Responsibility?

In Paul's letter to the Philippians - - he writes:

"work out our own salvation - with fear and trembling"

And the word "YOU" in this passage - - in GREEK - - is in PLURAL.

It says, "you all" - - - all of us.

This is NOT something Paul expected us to do ALONE.

Our salvation is something we can ONLY work out - - together.

With FEAR - - and trembling.

Can you remember a time when you trembled?

I remember moving from that safety of the mid-west - - to the big city of New York

I taught kids off the streets of Manhattan in Sunday School - - and I trembled.

I encountered - - and lived with - - people very different from myself - - different races - - lifestyles - - opinions - - - and I trembled.

AND - - as I trembled - - I grew - - and God worked in me.

And once in a while - - I still look up at the stars at night - - - and I tremble.

But I have to keep asking myself - - - if I STILL trust God enough to tremble.

And I have to keep remembering - - - that God IS truly in my midst.

God calls us to much MORE than a life of good, and easy things.

God calls us to FAITH - - and to respect - - and to compassion.

So - - - rather than focusing on the HONEY - - - like Pooh Bear - - - maybe we should focus on the honey BEE.

When the time comes for the bee to make its way out of the cell - - it has to make an opening - - and then PUSH through the opening. / The opening is a very narrow space. / And the bee is NEARLY CRUSHED from the PRESSURE of the cell walls on its body.

BUT - - in the process of leaving the hive, a TRANSFORMATION takes place.

The pressure of the sides of the cell - - and the wax covering on the bee's wings - - rubs the protective covering off the wings - - - so that upon emerging - - - the bee is able to fly.

Without the pressure - - - the bee would never fly.

God is at work on each one of us - - in this present wilderness

The way OUT - - is NOT to murmur and be anxious,

The way out is not to hoard up.

The way out - - if we BELIEVE the words of the Bible - - the way out is - - to trust God.

Maybe even to fear God.

But NOT to fear one another.

And NOT to LIVE in fear.

God WILL provide.

It might not be exactly what WE wanted.

But - - it might be even BETTER.

Like a balanced meal - - after too much feast and too much famine.

Amen.