



e - Votion

Dear Friends,

Today I am reading Exodus 16:2-15:

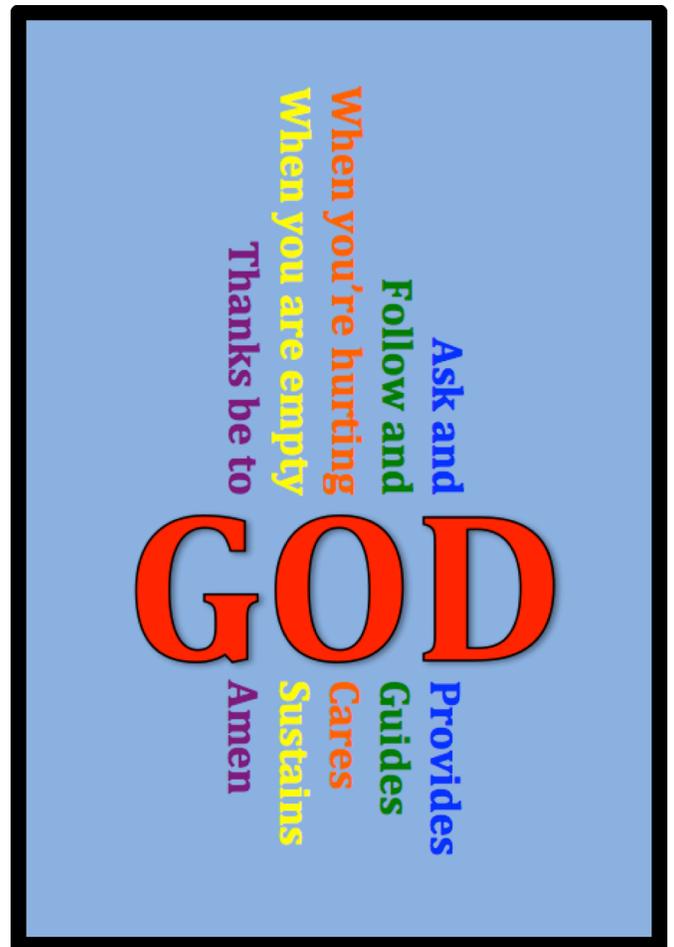
The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

Then the Lord said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not. On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days." So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "In the evening you shall know that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your complaining against the Lord. For what are we, that you complain against us?" And Moses said, "When the Lord gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the Lord has heard the complaining that you utter against him - what are we? Your complaining is not against us but against the Lord."

Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, "Draw near to the Lord for he has heard your complaining." And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud. The Lord spoke to Moses and said, "I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.'" In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat."

It is not fun to be out in the middle of nowhere and hungry. And getting stuck out in the middle of nowhere can be dangerous.

I think Israel's sojourn in the wilderness is about as smooth as the roughest grade of sandpaper. The



ac doesn't work. The car is overloaded. The desert is hot. The kids are CRANKY.... and its only been about 45 days or so since they left Egypt. Moses and Aaron are doing their very best, but the people are irritable.

"If only we had just died in Egypt," they whined.

They had left Egypt on a high note--a great moment in their history. But now they were in the wilderness. The wilderness of Sin. And the wilderness is a troubling place, a scary place, a place that smells of death because the necessities for survival were just not there, and when we don't have what we need to survive, a crisis of faith erupts.

They were acutely aware of inadequate food, water, and life support, and so they experienced a crisis of faith and a crisis of leadership. They attacked the leadership of Moses and Aaron, the deliverers of bondage.

The anxiety of the Israelites distorted their memories. They forgot about the abuse they suffered as slaves in Egypt, and they remembered only the meat and bread they ate.

When we experience stress, we too can glorify the past and demonize the present and the future. "If only...." "Those were the good ol' days, everything was perfect." We look backward instead of trusting the grace and will of God to proceed ahead and lead us onward.

The Israelites longed for the familiar comforts of slavery over the promises of freedom in the new Promised Land. Sometimes we find the path of discipleship frightening and unfamiliar. And we are tempted to long to go back to Egypt.... One person once said, "Its easier to get people out of slavery than to get slavery out of people."

It is so very easy to forget God's promises of grace to us in our baptism and to stray away and complain. Murmuring and complaining come naturally when we have lost our sense of purpose and are unclear of our goals and confused about our destiny.

According to a Gallup poll the number one spiritual need in the US today is the need to find purpose and meaning and direction in life. People ask questions like "What is God's will for my life?" "Why am I here on earth?" "What is my calling?"

I think everyone should read Victor Frankl's book Man's Search for Meaning. Frankl describes life in a Nazi death camp and the lessons he learned for spiritual survival. He lived in four different camps between 1942 and 1945, including Auschwitz, while his parents, his brother, and his pregnant wife perished. He says that we cannot avoid suffering, but we can choose how to cope with it, find meaning in it, and move forward with renewed purpose.

The Israelites suffered and complained. God responded with loving grace and provided what they needed--maybe not what they wanted but what they needed to survive. God gave manna, and in that gift of manna, God demonstrated grace and mercy to a cranky, rebellious people. This food of grace--manna-- became the food on which the Israelites would mainly subsist during their forty year sojourn in the wilderness.

Saved by grace. Nourished by grace. Manna, the gift of God, the bread of life sent down from heaven. Thanks be to God.

PRAISES AND PRAYER CONCERNS:

Please pray for:

Lisa Kleven, home following hip replacement surgery
Edna Johnson, continuing to improve
Martha Hale, in the death of her sister Faye Young
David Gbaa and his family, also his family in Liberia, and others facing Ebola virus
Our church, our church family, our community

Calendar and Announcements:

September 23 6:30 pm Leadership Pillar
September 28 UMW Sunday
3 pm District Conference Wesley Memorial UMC

"Preach the gospel at all times and when necessary use words."
St Francis of Assisi

Blessings,

Jane Taylor
First United Methodist Church
Johnson City TN