

Just Bread

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Theme:

When we are in need and God provides, the provision is often like the manna that the Israelites received. It is **just** enough, **just** in time, and **just** for now.

Exodus 16:13-21 NRSV

13 In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. 14 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. 15 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. 16 This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Gather as much of it as each of you needs, an omer [about 4 quarts] to a person according to the number of persons, all providing for those in their own tents.'" 17 The Israelites did so, some gathering more, some less. 18 But when they measured it with an omer, those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed. 19 And Moses said to them, "Let no one leave any of it over until morning." 20 But they did not listen to Moses; some left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and became foul. And Moses was angry with them. 21 Morning by morning they gathered it, as much as each needed; but when the sun grew hot, it melted.

God Provision for us:

Just enough

In the story, regardless of how or little effort each person invested in collecting the manna, everyone ended up with an omer – enough to sustain them for one day. Whether a person was industrious or lackadaisical, the result didn't change. For people prone to scarcity thinking or always feeling the need for more, this story is a challenge.

Black Friday and Cyber Monday exist because we are conditioned believe that "just enough" never is. During our sojourn in the wilderness, we learn to trust in a God who always provides enough, when we once trusted in Pharaoh who forced us to make bricks without straw – to do more and more with less and less. We live in a Pharaoh-based culture that thrives on feelings of insufficiency. God wants to set us free, and enable to become habituated to contentment.

Just in time

As I've said many times in my own wilderness journey, God's timing is perfect – and obnoxious! What we need always comes just in time – never late but never early either. Just when we think we can't go any further, God's provision arrives. And only in hindsight do we see how this has been true. We look back to see how God carried us through the lean times. I wonder how long it took the people to shift from anxious doubt ("The manna showed up this morning but what about tomorrow, or the next day?") to gratitude ("Wow

thank you so much for providing our daily bread again and again!) to indifference (“Oh look. More manna.”) It’s amazing how easy it is to take God’s provision for granted when it always just happens! The wilderness was intended to prepare the people for the Promised Land –a home overflowing with abundance—such that they would never forget that it was all from God and not something they should take credit for or feel they were entitled to. Of course they did forget. We all do. But times in the wilderness bring us back to this foundational truth.

Just for now

The manna didn’t last beyond a day’s use. The ungathered portion would melt in the sun, and the amount held over for the next day would rot. The only time it lasted was the day before Sabbath, when they were called to gather a double portion so that they (like God) could rest and restore.

There was no point in hoarding, in trying to corner the market on manna. What was given for today was intended to be used for today – used and shared – knowing that more would come when it was needed. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus will harken back to this wilderness experience when he says, “Think about yourselves as parents. You don’t withhold from your children when they are hungry, do you? You don’t give them bad things when they need good things, right? So if you know how to do that, how much more is that true with your Heavenly Parent? So don’t worry about what you will eat or drink or wear. God knows. God will provide.”

A Promise for All Creation

This is not just a promise to Christians. This describes the very nature of God, and what is available to all humans – indeed to all of creation! We believe in a God who provides enough for everyone. So if people don’t have enough, it’s not about God’s provision, but human stewardship.

Starvation in Yemen caused not by lacking food or lack of desire to feed, but by political and military powers who see it in their interest, directly or indirectly, for people to starve.

At the risk of overstating things, we are putting the world in peril as those who have lived with so little for so long now try to acquire that which we - who are used to having too much - can’t imagine living without.

As we experience God’s complete sufficiency, we can pray and share and work for justice knowing that God intends for every person in the world to have enough.

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