

# Sunday Morning

## Shared Reflection with Discussion & Prayer Groups

### Israel Receives Manna in the Wilderness

One of the most important things that Israel's experience of "*Life with God through the wilderness*" showed to later generations of Israel and to all of us is how the dangers and troubles of the wilderness take over our whole field of view, everything that we can see as we look around us. That's what happened to Israel.

The uncertainties, the dangers, the things we can't grasp, the vulnerabilities we face, the injustices that threaten us, the sense of things out of control, the losses, the potential losses, the overwhelming tasks, our sense that we don't deserve these troubles, our longing for almost any kind of security, just an end to it all!

**Exodus 16:1-5** tells of God giving Israel manna in the desert, bread to keep them alive, bread of life. But it's remarkable how much emphasis the narrative gives to the grumbling of the people who had only a month earlier been saved from slavery in Egypt through the Passover of the last plague and saved from death by the parting of the Sea to defeat the violence of Pharaoh.

They're like all us humans: The troubles of the present situation fill their entire vision so they can see nothing else. We panic. Things that happened a month ago are too far in the past to remember! The future will never come! There's no way out! It's unfair! We're hungry. We're suffering. We're going to die!

It's easy to condemn the grumblers, of course, but their complaints are understandable. These are freed slaves who've always been vulnerable to the people and situations of injustice and violence around them. We can excuse them.

This is Israel telling their own story, of course. And what they teach most emphatically is that their perception of reality was not true reality. It was only a limited sliver of the whole. The troubles they saw overwhelmed them, blocked their memory, shriveled their hope, withered any growing faith.

But the God of surprise, of creation, of the future, the God of hope broke in. “Look,” God said to Moses, *“I’m about to rain for you bread from heaven.”* This was the manna, a bread of life so remarkable that it got the name “manna” meaning “What is it?” It began to teach the people that the real world that includes God has more resources than the desert sands.

At the end of their journey through the wilderness, Moses reflected on the meaning of the manna:

### **Deuteronomy 8:3**

<sup>3</sup> The LORD fed you with manna ... in order you may know that the human being will not gain life by bread alone, but the human will gain life by everything that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

What did the manna mean? It meant that not one of us humans is going to gain real life by the bread we have, all the stuff we have in our control. Yes, our stuff, our bread is important to us, but it’s a tiny part of the great reality in which we live: *“The human will gain life by everything that comes from the mouth of God.”*

### **Jesus, Giver of the Bread of Life**

In **John 6:1-15**, we watch Jesus as he feeds a vast crowd with tiny resources. Jesus sees and lives within this far larger reality, the reality of God encompassing every trouble, every lack of resources, every need, and every hope. He knows what God’s creative power, generosity, and grace can do. The true reality – the resources of the Creator God of love, the grace of God – is beyond anything we imagine when we just look at the troubles of the wilderness around us. And Jesus knows that God is real! We really are living in the midst of life-giving bread.

The little-noted hero of this story is the little boy who lets go of his lunch of five barley rolls and two small fish and gives it to Jesus. He could have said, no thank you, I’ll eat my lunch. He would have had an adequate lunch. He lost control of his lunch, and he and the throng gained a dinner far larger than any could eat.

Jesus hopes that his disciples and we have eyes to see.

God has always been there. God's creative power, God's resources, God's love and grace. Grace is ready, as Paul says, to be made perfect in our weakness.

What's there in our own resources that we can bring to Jesus? What is there in our needs that we can bring? What can we learn to see through his eyes, so that we can see them within true reality? The challenge is always to see through and beyond what our whole world tells us is the total of reality – to see the presence of God. *“Be still and know that I am God.”*

### **Resources for the Future**

1. Yesterday, we listed what we're up against, our anxieties, fears and needs. We prayed together about those things. Reflect on your list now.
2. As we reflect – during a song – let's put ourselves with that boy letting go of his lunch for Jesus to use. We don't know what he may do with it!  
What loaves and fishes do we bring?  
What resources, what creativity, struggles, love, or energy do we bring?  
What stresses, plans, troubles, service, ambitions, or kindness do we bring?  
What study, understanding, wisdom, time, relationships, etc. do we bring?  
How do we open our hands and let go of control so that we can experience the creative grace of God.  
Think concretely about your life in the weeks and months ahead while we're still surrounded by this wilderness of our time.
3. Make a new list of your specific plans and commitments of what you want to bring and release into Jesus' hands. Save it to use in your discussion group.

### **Create Your Own List Now.**

After time for writing and reflecting, we'll transition to smaller discussion groups to share our concerns and pray for each other.

### **Guidance for Discussion & Prayer Groups**

1. Again, as your group begins, go through the group and each of you “count off” (1, 2, 3, etc.) and say your name. Remember your number and notice who has the next number after you. As discussion goes on, take special

notice of the person with that next number after you. Later in the group time, each of us will pray for the person with that next number after us. The person with the last number prays for no. 1.

2. Take turns sharing your lists of resources you bring for God to use in this wilderness. Share your plans and commitments to allow your resources to be used by Jesus. Listen carefully to everyone, but especially to the person for whom you will pray.
3. When everyone has shared, take time to pray for each other, using the number order.

### **Return from Discussion & Prayer Groups**

### **Communion**