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There's Not Enough

Exodus 16:1-15

The whole congregation of the Israelites set out from Elim; and Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt.

²The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. ³The 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.'

⁴ 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.

⁵On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days.' ⁶So 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, ⁷and 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?' ⁸And 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.'

⁹ Then Moses said to Aaron, 'Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, "Draw near to the LORD, for he has heard your complaining."

¹⁰And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked towards the wilderness, and the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. ¹¹The LORD spoke to Moses and said, ¹²'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."'

¹³ In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. ¹⁴When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. ¹⁵When 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.’

Free from being slaves in Egypt, the Israelites are now 6-weeks into their journey. For 6-weeks they have been following Moses, really God, but they seem to have forgotten about God. They are complaining to Moses and Aaron AND about Moses and Aaron, who are their spiritual leaders, instead of remembering it is God that has brought them to where they are. It is God that leads Moses to do what is best for the Israelites. 6-weeks is long enough for them to realize they are moving into the wilderness. They are no longer filled with the excitement of freedom from slavery. They are now in panic mode as hunger strikes. 6-weeks is all it takes for Israel to forget that God does listen, that God does care, that God is active in their lives. The look of scarcity in the wilderness is too much for the hungry people of Israel.

So what do they do? Well, besides complain, which they do, they begin to reminisce. They say, ‘Why did we ever leave Egypt. Being in slavery was so nice. We had plenty of food, a nice bed, we were comfortable. It was so luxurious. Oh, to be able to go back would be so nice.’ ...Do you see what fear does to us? How it alters our view. How it changes our behavior. How it changes our path.

In Chad they have a saying, “one day of hunger can make a wife leave her husband’s house.” I’ll say it again, “one day of hunger can make a wife leave

her husband's house." When we are suffering we don't see the world around us the way it really is, it's altered, our vision is skewed with lenses focused around ourselves. We aren't ourselves when we are hungry. We turn into a worse version of ourselves. Whenever I marry a couple, I always tell the wedding party at the rehearsal to make sure they eat before they arrive the next day to take pictures. Why? Because people are more cooperative and patient when they're full. They're happier and easier to work with.

Here, as Moses would tell you, these people were not easy to work with. Moses tells God what they're saying. 'They want to go back to Egypt. The scarcity of the desert is too much for them. They want to turn around. They're losing their trust in you.'

That's one of the things that fear leads us to do. We look back fondly at things when we don't like where we currently are. We could, in actuality, be happier where we currently are than where we were, yet the moment we begin to be unhappy or dissatisfied, we look back reminiscing with fondness. Fear and anxiety leads us to anything that gets us out of our current situation, even if it means returning to a shortened life of slavery. We've survived the past, we know we can do it, but we're uncertain about the future. And our anxiousness leaves us grasping at anything we can to get out of our current situation.

Imagine, we could have a debilitating pain in our foot for twenty years, then out of the blue, a new pain arises from our knee and we long for that old

pain we used to experience from our foot. We look back at the past with such fondness we forget to look ahead with hope. We forget that we can dream of a life without pain in our leg or our foot. Whatever has our attention is what we worry about. It's what we talk about and complain about. We hone in, as it becomes our focus.

The Israelites are free from slavery but the reality of making it on their own is harder than they imagined, so they look back at the days of slavery with fondness. It's a lot like leaving your parents house for the first time. You move out all excited, no longer under their rule in their house. But when you realize how hard it is to get a job that pays the bills, to cook and clean, do your own laundry, pay taxes, make car payments, you begin to complain about this whole adulting thing and reminisce fondly of how you had it made when you were living with your parents. You forget about the house rules and restrictions. You forget about your new found freedom. Your perception changed. And part of the fear then becomes the realization of not ever being able to go back to the way things were.

That's what the Israelites were facing. There they are in the wilderness, expecting death, wishing only to turn around and make it safely back to Egypt, back to the way things were. Where they had food each day, and a place to lay their head at night. They were too afraid to go forward, but there's not enough. Not enough food. Not enough strength. Not enough trust.

We as church do this. We dream of something better and when God leads us out we get uncomfortable and we cry ‘Turn around! There’s not enough money, not enough people, not enough volunteers. There’s not enough space, not enough interest, not enough support.’ We get scared when there’s not enough and we turn away from where God is leading us.

But God, in the scarcity of the desert, heard their cry, and gave them what they needed each day to move forward. For their promise of life and identity was not behind them, it’s in front of them.

The theme for World Food Day this year is small farmers. Small farmers are changing the way we view food. They are taking us from scarcity to abundance. Showing us that regardless the space of land we have to work and grow from, that we can do it. From balcony and indoor garden systems to backyard and community gardens. These vines of food are fields of faith that are blessing people all around the world. Yay for small farmers and the knowledge they are passing on. Knowledge that’s feeding the world.

We have abundant harvests here in Iowa, as well as grocery stores and even 24-hour drive thru food places. But for many throughout the world they don’t know where their next meal is coming from. We pray, give us this our daily bread. Just as a newborn baby cries out to let their parents know they need food, the Israelites cry out to God. And God hears them. And God cares.

God provides, there is no need for stockpiling. There is enough. Enough for everyone. New blessings come each day, you just have to look for them. Their love for God will grow and deepen as their journey continues.

The abundance of quail and water comes. God's people can dream and hope for new excitingly great things. Knowing God is with us, God will provide. Life is no longer built under fear and anxiety, but instead it's built on the freedom and abundant grace of God. It turns out the wilderness is a lot better than Egypt ever was.