Manna

Exodus 16:1-18

Buckingham Church

October 10, 2021

Rochelle A. Stackhouse

What is it? That’s what the word “manna” is understood to mean. It’s the confused, stressed, traumatized, and wandering free-but-hungry Hebrew people looking at a gift from God that had been right under their noses all the time that was not very flashy or miracle-y, and wondering what it was. Answer? Bread. Well, that’s one answer.

What is it? A reminder that the presence of God is usually not apparent in dramatic miracles like the Red Sea parting (that sort of thing is a bit rare), but God is so often there for us in the ordinary. It’s that “daily bread” we pray for many times without thought. Not a four-star, five course meal. What is it? God with you, every day, when you didn’t even notice.

What is it? A bit of a test, actually. Are you ready for the future, a future which will have lots of unknowns, like the manna, and lots of things that are very different from any past you remember, like the manna? Or are you stuck in the past, imagining sumptuous feasts in slavery in Egypt (which never happened)? The test is: are you ready to live into all that God hopes for you, even if it’s different from your hopes, or do you need a bit more time for recovery, renewal, and re-orientation? A bit more wilderness, perhaps?

What is it? A bit boring and kind of thin for dinner? Or a reminder that God will never abandon you, has never abandoned you, is patient and kind, long-suffering, willing to stick with you until you make the hard decisions, make the changes you need to make to walk into the future God has imagined for you, even when you reject that future, or God.

What is it? A sign that this future will not be like the past. This is good news, but you might not see it that way at the time. Like where we are now in late pandemic, racial justice reckoning, clarity that we are not going back to what we thought of as normal. We’ve been in the wilderness, and you don’t come out of any wilderness the same way you went in if you walk through that wilderness with God. Again, this is good news, but we don’t always see it as that in the moment. Perhaps you have heard the sideways take on that old Footprints poem? You know the one where a person sees two sets of footprints in the sand representing their life? They learn that the second set of prints has been God walking beside them, and in times when only one set appeared, God explains that is when God carried them. And then we add this. The person sees what looks like drag marks in the sand, and God explains that this is where God dragged them kicking and screaming into a future they didn’t want to enter! What is it? The first fruits of that future.

What is it? An invitation from God to look more carefully at your life right now to see where God has sprinkled, sometimes rained down on you, love, food for body and spirit. An invitation to pay attention to your life and expect God to be present, see what God **is** doing instead of complaining that God isn’t doing anything. Manna and quails are naturally occurring phenomena in the part of the world where the Hebrews were wandering. They were already there, but some folks were looking for something else, so they missed what God had already given them. What is it? An invitation to learn how to recognize God in your midst.

So, what is it for you? Where is the manna; where are the quails? Who is Moses for you, those people in your life calling you to pay attention, to look forward, not backward, to remember how much you are loved, who help you through the wilderness which tests you until you are ready to go the next step in your life?

Listen to the words of the Psalmist from Psalm 103:

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless God’s holy name.

Let my whole being bless the Lord and never forget all God’s goodness to me.

How God forgives sins, heals sickness, saves your life from the pit, and crowns you with steadfast love and compassion, and satisfies you with plenty of good things.

The Lord works justice for all who are oppressed.

The Lord is compassionate and merciful, very patient, and full of faithful love.

God won’t always play the judge and be angry forever.

God doesn’t repay us according to our wrongdoing, because as high as heaven is above the earth, that’s how large God’s faithful love is.

Like parents feel compassion for their children, that’s how the Lord feels compassion for us. Because God knows how we are made. God remembers we’re just dust.

But the Lord’s faithful love is from forever ago to forever from now.

All God’s creatures, bless the Lord! Everywhere, throughout God’s realm, let my whole being bless the Lord. Amen.