

A Sermon by the Very Rev. Dr. Renee Tembeckjian

Trinity Episcopal Church

1 August 2021

Proper 13B: Exodus 16:2-4, 9-15; Psalm 78:23-29; Ephesians 4:1-16; John 6:24-35

“Daily Bread”

There is a modern-day fable that goes like this: a major storm is brewing and evacuation warnings issued to all the residents of a coastal town. But one fellow, seeing the perfect opportunity to prove the existence of God, decides to stay put. God would send a miracle to save him so that all might see and believe. He was not crazy or ignorant – like many of us, this is what he had been taught all his life about the nature and behavior of God.

As the storm waters approached their street, neighbors piled into their cars and begged him to come along, but he declined: “Don’t worry, you’ll see – God will save me!” As the water reached his front step, a woman in a canoe called out to him, but again, he declined: “You’ll see -- God will rescue me!”

As floodwaters poured into his living room, he heard the megaphone from a police boat, directing him to board, but he would not comply. The waters were now forcing him upstairs and onto his roof. A helicopter pilot signaled that he would drop a ladder, but the man waved him off, too. No need. God would save.

Eventually, the flood overwhelms the house entirely. The man is swept away to perish.

The fable continues that when the man reaches the pearly gates, he is perplexed and upset. Why was his faith not rewarded? Why did God not save him? And God says,

Look, here, I sent neighbors, police, strangers, and a pilot.

I sent a car, a canoe, a motorboat, and a helicopter.

What on earth were you looking for?

What on *earth*, indeed?



In today’s lessons, the Israelites are in need of rescue. In their long, arduous exodus from slavery into freedom, they are increasingly restless and reactive – fretful about the future and cynical about their leaders. As often happens when experiencing distress or uncertainty in our circumstances, they start revising their own history: *Why did we ever leave Egypt? Maybe slavery wasn’t so bad, after all. At least we knew what to expect each day.*

They are also hungry, and cry out to be fed. The story goes that God heard their pleas – they find quail in their camps every evening, and “manna” on the ground every morning.

Now, some believe that manna was a bread that God literally rained down upon them. Others believe that this so-called *manna from heaven* was the resin of the desert tamarisk plant, or a fragile mushroom resembling hoarfrost.

Even if this edible food was not a literal care package from heaven, it was still a blessing of creation. It still helped keep them alive.

It is good for us to wonder about such things, to consider many possibilities about God, unlike that fellow in the hurricane who put God in such a small box. A little humility on our part would be good. We don't want to become *so* certain in our beliefs about how God looks and acts, that we miss other expressions of divine presence – utterly unexpected, wonderfully imaginative, and powerfully life-giving expressions of grace....

...because when we do become hyper-focused on the details of sacred story, we may well miss the larger glimpse that story offers into the nature of God. We don't want to become so fixed on *accuracy* that we overlook the subtle invitation into *wisdom*.

And it would seem that the wisdom in today's lessons is expressed by Jesus himself:

I am the living bread that came down from heaven.

And, as those who claim to be followers of Jesus, I believe that we are called to walk in his Way and become living bread for this world...

...to *be* the bread of comfort and presence to the sorrowful or lonely, the bread of encouragement to those longing for a second chance. We are called to be the bread of dignity to the exploited, justice for the oppressed, the bread of embrace for the marginalized and segregated.

We are called, like Jesus, to be the living bread hope and healing for all who suffer in body, mind, spirit, or circumstance...

...so that when anyone in this world finds the storm rising around them – whatever that storm may be – when, in fear, outrage, or crisis of faith, they cry, "Where were you, God, when I needed you?"

...they might just imagine an answer like this:

*"Look here, I sent you a friend, a fellow companion, an advocate.
There was someone to pray with you, to get you to a doctor,
to shop for you, walk with you, celebrate with you.
I called a community to feed you and clothe you, I called a ministry to shelter you.*

I send living bread.

What on earth are you looking for?

And they will see that the presence of God is right here all the time...

...because it is right here in *us*.

Amen.