

Poor Moses, here the Israelites, in the wilderness granted, but miles away from Pharaoh's chariots and warriors, here instead of words of gratitude, they come with a complaint. Their empty stomachs have erased the memory of the terror and the relief. Perhaps it was all the impediments that fell when they were in Egypt that have made them think Moses could supply whatever they needed. You can almost hear their whiny voices: "Moses, we're hungry. Why did you bring us here - so we can die of hunger far from any place we've ever been? Moses.....do something." FRIENDLY FIRE

I'm sure less than charitable thoughts went through Moses' mind. 'I wish you had stayed in Egypt. You aren't helping the situation.' To be fair, they were hungry and they were scared. Hungry and scared enough to make slavery in Egypt look pretty good. I imagine Moses may have been a little hungry and scared himself. So overcome by this complaining crowd, he doesn't even have time to panic before God tells him what the plan is.

The Psalm Jessica read says, "they ate and were well filled for he gave them what they craved." I'm not sure that "craved" refers to the quails and the manna. They were hungry, no doubt, but I just can't imagine a craving for a fine dew that forms on the grass in the morning. From the psalm again, God "rained down on them manna to eat, and gave them the grain of heaven." Then the psalm relates that God, "gave them the bread of angels". Now that sounds more like what they might be craving.

The Israelites were several days out from Egypt, not knowing where they were or where they were going. They were afraid. Now that their hunger is to be satisfied, they can allow themselves to feel what it is they are truly craving - safety, security, reassurance that they haven't just made the biggest mistake of their lives. Quail and manna filled their tummies, but it was God they were craving.

Several summers ago, Julianne Zimmermann preached about an inexplicable occurrence that we all have: we encounter God, we have a real experience of the divine and then, we forget about it. We go on with our lives beset by worries and insecurities once again. That is what happened to the Israelites who were told to gather only enough manna for a day, except in anticipation of the Sabbath when they should gather an extra day's portion. Every day the manna comes and every night the quails descend. The Israelites craved a sign of God's presence, of God's love, of God's concern and they received it. And for a moment they relax, relieved of their panic. But it begins to be harder and harder to trust that. As their trust wanes, they decide to take matters into their own hands and start stocking up on manna only to discover that manna doesn't have a long shelf life. All that they have gathered rots and is no longer edible, and it probably smells really bad, and it definitely makes God really mad.

Why is it so hard to trust God, to trust God with our lives? We can empathize with the Israelites in the wilderness, wandering in the wilderness is how it's referred to, wandering, adrift: "Hey did we go past that bush a few hours ago?" They've stayed in one place for a while now, being fed. But tomorrow? Tomorrow. It's always about tomorrow. If we can just get that locked in, we can rest. When someone comes to the church looking for shelter or food, and we end up putting them in the Red Roof Inn or some other place, I always pay for two nights. I know if it were me, knowing I had to

check out the next day, I wouldn't be able to sink into the security and luxury of a warm, dry, safe place with thinking about tomorrow. I want them to have one night when they know where they'll be the next night.

Why is it so hard to trust God, especially in the Wilderness, the Wilderness we find ourselves in now. Haven't we been by that bush before? Haven't we been here before? After a few weeks without masks, we are back in them again. Which way are we heading? Is this a pause on a forward path? Or is this a change of direction?

Carol and I have a vacation scheduled starting Monday. Maybe you can identify with how much we need this vacation. Perhaps, we could say that we are craving it. With the CDC as the rule maker, I feel like praying to them, "Please let conditions allow us this simple trip to Vermont. Please let us go to visit Carol's family in Upstate New York. Please..... It is tomorrow again. Can't we get a guarantee? Please..... Or at least, let us down now. Disappointed hopes are killers. We need this vacation on a deep emotional, spiritual level. We need breakfast delivered to the room; we need a giant tub with water jets, we need to look out our window and see something new. We need it; neeeeeeeed it. We crave it.

Whether it is the Israelites in the Sinai wilderness or Judy and Carol in Reading - we have a vision of where we're going and we want to make sure it comes to pass. We have a craving. WE have a craving. WE think we have a craving and We think we are the ones to slake it. In the extremes of Wilderness or Pandemic, we need proof, promises, and partnership to fill our craving.

But there will always be a tomorrow, we are often in a wilderness, there will always be a craving - T.S. Eliot refers to it as a Famished Craving in his poem Gerontion. And it's not a craving for a spa vacation or a settled land - it is a craving for how that makes us feel. What we crave, what can calm that craving is remembering the experience of God we've had, it is allowing our real needs, our real cravings, into our consciousness and then to let God take them. Not take them away - we are human and flawed in our trust - but to let God take them is to let God take the reins, and the map, and the reservations. We cannot wait until we have everything locked in and locked up to trust God. That time will never come. We must trust God now, we must put God first on all our lists, we must arise with God, and go to sleep in God. As the Psalmist says: he gave them what they craved - even if they, we, don't know what that is. God does.