

## SCRIPTURE READING FOR OCTOBER 17, 2021 @ CAPC OAKLAND

### Exodus 16:1-18

NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION

<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. <sup>3</sup> The 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.”

<sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days.” <sup>6</sup> So 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, <sup>7</sup> and *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?” <sup>8</sup> And 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.”

<sup>9</sup> Then Moses said to Aaron, “Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, ‘Draw near to the Lord, for he has heard your *complaining*.’”

<sup>10</sup> And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and *the glory of the Lord* appeared in the cloud. <sup>11</sup> The Lord spoke to Moses and said, <sup>12</sup> “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.’”

### LANGUAGE NOTES & TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

**Exodus** – the second book of the Hebrew Bible – stretches from the enslavement of the Hebrew people by the Pharaoh(s) in *Mitzráyim* [the Hebrew name for Egypt which means “narrow straits” (mi, “from,” tzar, “narrow” or “tight”)]. They had first arrived as hungry refugees, welcomed with open arms, when Joseph was Pharaoh’s right hand man. But over time that history had been forgotten, and they become easy, cheap labor for the empire of Pharaoh and his economy. Moses organizes and leads the people to freedom from their slavery, leaving behind the narrow space of *Mitzráyim* for the wide-open spaciousness of freedom and the promised land. But the journey is a long one, both in miles and terrain, as well as in terms of spiritual growth and political re-organization. It’s a regime change that impacts all of the life of the Hebrew people.

Once free they people have to organize life anew, around the God who was their deliverer and who is the center of their existence. They escape from Pharaoh (Exodus 13 & 14). They then celebrate their deliverance with song and prayer (Exodus 15) and then as they travel they begin to discover the difficulty of regime change, of starting anew, of leaving the old behind in order to welcome a new creation. The road is long. The water is scarce and often bitter. The food not as good as they remembered in back in Egypt. Freedom suddenly looks much less desirable, and the certainty of daily life in Egypt seems to have been an adequate price for their enslavement. They’ve experienced God in the extraordinary parting of the Sea and the Passover, but they don’t seem to see or hear YHWH God in the ordinary of life.

**Elim**:: this is where they were in Exodus 15 – an oasis with 12 sources of water and 70 palm-date trees. They leave there, where everything seems possible, and enter the wilderness of **SIN** a wasteland where nothing seems possible, and starvation and death seem likely.

<sup>13</sup> In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. <sup>14</sup> When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. <sup>15</sup> When 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. <sup>16</sup> This is what the Lord has commanded: ‘Gather as much of it as each of you needs, an *omer* to a person according to the number of persons, all providing for those in their own tents.’” <sup>17</sup> The Israelites did so, some gathering more, some less. <sup>18</sup> But when they measured it with an *omer*, those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed.

#### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & EXAMEN:

- What engaged you, enraged you, or surprised you in this text?
- How do you respond to the Israelites so quickly turning to complaining about their lot. Do you find that realistic? What is that about?
- Terrence E. Fretheim writes “the lack of discernment of God’s presence in the ordinary leads to a denial of God’s activity in the extraordinary.” In their hunger, the people forget the miracle that just happened. Have you ever struggled with faith in the ordinary?
- We’re in a time of supposed scarcity and shortage due to COVID. Our capacity for instant gratification has been interrupted. How does the message of this story to apply to what we’re living today?
- What invitation do you heard the Spirit of God speaking to you – or to us, as a church – to act, speak, be or change through this word of scripture?

*enough for that day*:: this idiom “the same daily assignment” is also used in Exodus 5:13, 19 and 6:14 when the taskmasters talk of how the Hebrew slaves have to collect the straw each day to make the bricks they need for their construction work.

*complaining*:: from γογγυσμόν [goggusmos] :: meaning murmuring, grumbling; complaint. Even though they’ve received so much they complain, wishing for more, for something else. This same word is used in the New Testament when the crowds turn against Jesus or his followers in John 7:12; Acts 6:1. It’s also used by Paul in Philippians 2:14-15 when he exhorts the people to faithful living: “Do all things without *murmuring* and arguing, so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world.”

*in the morning.. in the evening*:: it’s as if this story is written to echo the language of the creation story told in Genesis 1 about the seven days...there “*morning and evening*” are repeated as narrative structures. It’s as if this story of manna is like a new creation story.

I am the LORD :: יהוה יהוה YHWH the name of God the warrior-deliverer-redeemer first revealed at the burning bush.

*the glory of the Lord* :: כבוד יהוה - this is the first time that this is mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures. The cloud of fire and column of smoke will lead the people throughout their wanderings in the desert wilderness, reside in the tabernacle, and eventually “settle” in the space of the Temple when it is built.

**What is it?**:: in Hebrew the expression is *màn hû* – or *manna* - literally meaning **what** “*màn*” **[is] it** “*hû*”?

It’s been noted that migrating birds sometimes fall to the ground exhausted from strong head winds, and at certain seasons of the years certain desert plants exude a sweet, sticky, edible substance overnight that solidifies in the cold. It’s a potential natural/scientific explanation for the miracle of manna and quail. If that is what happened is it less of a miracle? Why?; why not?

*omer* :: (Hebrew: אֹמֶר ‘ōmer) is an ancient Israelite unit of dry measure used in the era of the Temple in Jerusalem; equivalent to the capacity of 43.2 eggs, or approximately 1.770 kg.