

16TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

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Photograph by Carolyn Wheeler

READ: EXODUS 16:2-15

"I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day."

REFLECT:

I love this time of year. The beginning of a chill in the air, the leaves on the trees beginning to turn, the sunlight softer and more golden, the comfort of soups and stews full of delicious root veg. It's a season of endings and beginnings - the summer is over, the new term starts, it's time to get our jumpers out of their summer storage and turn on the central heating. And in our churches it would usually be the season of harvest festivals. Colourful displays of produce and fancy bread. A time of sharing and giving thanks for food, glorious food.

So our reading from Exodus - a story of daily bread provided, of nature's miraculous provision, of morning dew on the ground and a carpet of mysterious flakes, like fallen leaves... well it

seems appropriate. As do some of the lessons that this story imparts.

Daniel Erlander, whose cartoon-illustrated meta-narrative of the Bible *Manna and Mercy* I highly recommend, describes the 40 years the Hebrews spent wandering the desert as God's 'wilderness school.' It was a necessary time of unlearning the worldview of empire and learning to be God's people, God's partners in covenant. Lesson 1: sharing. God, the generous creator, provides enough for all to flourish. But only if we don't take more than we need. Greed and hoarding corrupt and spoil what was life-giving and good (read on to v.20 to see what I mean). It strikes me as similar to the creation and fall story of Genesis 2 and 3. Humans are created to 'tend and protect' the garden (2:15). God provides them with good and plentiful food, within (generous) limits. They can take as much as they wish, up to a point. But they're forbidden from taking everything. And because their desire is insatiable and their consumption out of control... relationships get broken and paradise is lost.

On Sunday evening I watched David Attenborough's new BBC documentary, *Extinction*. It provided terrifying evidence of the scale and speed at which humanity continues to live the same mistake, corrupting and spoiling God's creation, this planet on which we depend, with our greed, our insatiable desire, our over-consumption. The facts presented were chilling: 1 million plant and animal species faced with extinction. Our food, water and climate under threat. There was even a compelling argument made that our exploitation of nature has given birth to Covid-19, and that there are likely to be many more Pandemics in the future.

It seems we could really do with going back to wilderness school. Perhaps that's one possible way of viewing the 'desert' - the liminal space - of partial lockdown we find ourselves in now. We're addicted to ways of living that will kill us. We need to detox - to deconstruct and unlearn our harmful habits. Because as God's people we're supposed to be modelling a radically different way of living. A way of sharing, of generosity, of trust, of life, of flourishing for all.



Illustration from 'Manna and Mercy' by Daniel Erlander

RESOURCES:

Our friends at Wheatley URC have a huge archive of online sermons you can listen to, and are regularly posting new resources on their website:

www.wheatleyurc.org.uk

SUPPORT:

Pauline and myself, and your elders, are here for you if you need someone to talk to, have a prayer request, or just fancy a chat! Ping us an email or give us a ring.