

EXODUS 16 – MANNA IN THE WILDERNESS

I don't know you.

I don't know you as individuals, nor as a congregation.

I don't know where you are in your journey – what makes you sing for joy....what keeps you up at night

What questions you cry out into the silence

Or leave half formed for fear that there will be consequences were they to be voiced.

I don't know the places to which your heart leaps when I say the words

Holy

Faith.

Trust.

That's a hard one; trust. Do you find?

Trust.

Are you someone who trusts easily? Is trust an issue in your life?

Let me tell you a story. It's a story about trust.

Who you can trust. What you can trust. And who, and what, you cannot.

Are you ready?

It's a great story.

So....do as you do when you're about to hear one. Sit back...close your eyes if you want to....be prepared for adventure, intrigue, betrayal,

And, as the Sufis say, I don't know if this really happened

But I know it's true.

It all began with Abraham and Sarah, living comfortably in a place called Ur.

Well into their retirement years, coasting, having come to grips with the fact that they would never have children or grandchildren....life was good.

AND THEN

God calls them. To leave everything they know, everyone dear to them....follow the voice of an unnamed, invisible, unspeakable God, into an uncertain future. Just trust me, the voice says. And I promise you three things.

What were those three things?

- 1) a land
- 2) descendants...as many as.....
- 3) God's abiding presence.

Where were they going? They didn't know.

How long would it take?

They didn't know.

And the descendants? Well, that was the thing. Abe and Sarah were well past child bearing years.

But they did it. They left everything and began a journey. After a long time and a couple of bad false starts, and just as they were set to give it all up, angels came and promised that by that time the following year, Sarah would have a son.

What did she do when she heard the news?

She laughed – yes she did. So did Abraham.

But – sure enough, by the next year, the baby was born. A son. They called him ___? Which means ___? The promise was true.

Isaac grew...there were scary times including a nightmare with a ram and a thicket... But when Sarah died, Abraham found a wife for Isaac. Her name was_____?

Isaac and Rebecca eventually had children themselves. Twins. Rebecca said that when they were inside her they fought so much she thought she wasn't going to survive the pregnancy. It was a sign of things to come. They were born....Twin boys. The first was born, red and hairy. They called him_____ which means hairy. His brother, born grasping his brother's heel,

Rebecca had been told that Jacob the younger would be the one to carry on the promise, even though by law and custom it ought to be Esau, the elder. In a painful, horrible family twist, Rebecca and Jacob tricked Esau and Isaac into giving the blessing to Jacob. Esau was so furious he threatened to kill his brother, and so Jacob fled for his life.

On the way he dreamed of a ladder with angels going up and down on it – do you remember? He met Rachael, fell in love. Her father said that if he worked 7 years he could have her as his wife. At the end of 7 years, Laban tricked Jacob and married him to Rachael's sister instead. Her name was _____? After 7 more years, Jacob was married to both sisters. 12 sons and one daughter later, he wanted to go back home, take a chance that he could make up with his brother. And he did. On the way there, just the day before he was to meet Esau again, not sure if he'd still be threatening to kill him for the betrayal. He had a dream. A man wrestled with him all night, Jacob said "I won't let you go until you bless me." And the man gave him a new name. You will no longer be called Jacob, he said. You will be called _____. And so Israel went home, was Esau still wanting to kill him? He was not. And the brothers lived side by side.

Israel, with his 2 wives and 2 concubines, had 12 sons and one daughter (know her name?)

His favourite was_____? Joseph. You know THIS story. He made his favourite son a coat – and for the brothers that was the last straw. First they planned to kill him but then found a way to make some money instead. They sold him to some passing traders...he ends up in Egypt. Because of his ability to interpret dreams he ends up second in command to the Pharaoh, and in a position to offer grain to starving people during a 7 year famine. His brothers come to Egypt looking for food, meet up with Joseph, all is forgiven and they all settle in Egypt. The land of Goshen.

Generations later, there are many, many of them. Pharaoh is using them as slaves for his building projects. They are oppressed and enslaved. From a burning bush, a man called Moses hears the voice of God saying “Go to the Pharaoh and tell him ‘let my people go’”.

He protests then finally goes; Pharaoh of course refuses. Ten plagues later, Moses with his sister _____ and his brother _____ lead the people out of Egypt. It’s a chariot chase....finally, there they are: the people of Israel, running....Pharaoh and his chariots behind them and a sea in front of them. What are they going to do? Moses holds out his staff...the sea parts, and they cross. The sea closes andthey are free. Miriam leads them in a song and dance of freedom and thanksgiving.

And that’s where we meet them today.

Picture this: You’re free after generations of slavery. Your escape has been miraculous and against all odds. You are about to journey to the land promised to A and S all those years ago.

What do you do?

Yea. Complain about the food.

Listen:

READ IT.

So: what do you think?

There are so many sermons in here it would make your head spin.

I just had to pick one and go with it.

Trust. And how much is enough.

Those two things just kept coming to me...so that’s where we’re going.

Trust.

And how much is enough.

My mom grew up in the depression. She was always afraid there wouldn’t be enough. Even when she knew with her head that she had enough...still somewhere inside herself she was afraid about that.

When you rescue a dog from the street, who has been hungry.....

Or when children are brought into care after being hungry and neglected

It takes a long time for them to trust that there will be enough food, not just today but tomorrow and the day after that. It takes a long time for them to stop eating excessively, storing against the hunger of tomorrow.

Trust. And how much is enough.

Some of you will know that my dad was an alcoholic. Psychologists will tell you that when you grow up with an alcoholic parent you learn two things: Don't trust. And don't feel.

Trust. And how much is enough.

In many people, there is a deep seated fear – learned from painful experience – that there may not be enough. Maybe that's true for all of us in some way – do you think? Maybe not food; maybe ...other things?

Because lots and lots of people store up, hoard, try to take more than our share.

WHY???

Why is that?

Whole industries are fuelled by our insecurity and fear about not having enough.

Buy our product – because you're not clean enough. Your teeth aren't white enough. Your house isn't fashionable enough. You don't smell good enough. YOU'RE not good enough.

And there are entire TV seasons with the goal of choosing one person every week who will be told before millions of viewers that they are not good enough.

Political and economic agendas that are fear based – what if there's not enough for us they ask, and draw an ever tightening circle around what "us" means.

To all of that

This story says

ENOUGH. THAT'S ENOUGH.

Stop – breathe – inhale the scent of the Holy.

Holiness, wonder, abundance.... is all around us.

Not in some distant promised land flowing with milk and honey

But right here and right now.

In the wilderness and the uncertainty

In the hunger and the fear.

THIS is where God is to be found

And it is enough.

In a world that tells us

You don't have enough

You don't do enough
YOU are not enough

This story says MAH NAH – What IS that???

Quails and manna cover the ground – can't you see them? Signs of outrageous faithfulness and abundance. Signs of God's faithful care are everywhere! And there is enough.

What if we knew that? I mean deeply and personally in our guts and in the place where the fear lurks?

What if we learned that no matter what, there will be,

Day by day

Minute by minute

What we need to live, to survive, and to thrive?

To trust the goodness that brought us to birth

The integrity and faithfulness of the mystery that moves the sun and the stars

And what if we lived in a way that made that manifest

Gloriously, deliberately, sacrificially and joyfully manifest

In how we organize our common life? There is enough. Plenty and to spare.

What would the world be like

How would it be different

If everyone had enough

Enough food

Enough love

What if our families were manna families

Where we woke up each morning confident, knowing, trusting, that today is a day when we will have what we need

Manna economics

Policies and systems that recognize maggots when they see them

And allowed the holy goodness of this earth to shine through and to provide for everyone

As is it's creator's intent?

My prayer for you

For us all

Is that we will know and know again the faithfulness of God

Who provides bread in the wilderness

And calls us to lives of wonder and trust

Amen