

Sermon 21 September 2014

Psalm 105: 1-6, 37-49 Exodus 16:2-15 "Reasons for Thanksgiving: 2"

Prayer: Lord in our daily life remind us of the reasons we have to give thanks to you. Remind us that your presence will always guide but never replace our need to work as we live in your way. Remind us that you do give enough for our daily needs – and forgive us our need to hoard and have our private manna-insurance schemes. As our trust in you grows may we become more like you, generous in word, in deed and blessing the world, so reasons for thanksgiving abound. Amen

Here at St Johns we are in a season of thanksgiving, the last Sunday of September is our annual Thanksgiving Sunday. It has been a tradition of St Johns since the early days to make an annual financial gift to the Lord's work here at St Johns that is over and above our regular tithing / giving. This year it has been agreed we will put our thanks offerings towards the establishment of a fund for the Children and Youth Leader's salary. There is more detail in the newsletter on this matter, and at St Johns we have been well blessed here by the level of giving the Lord does lay upon our hearts, so it is with real thanksgiving we observe this season. cV

Last week I shared how the Lord is patient in teaching me to trust him to provide the Scriptures needed for us to focus on Thanksgiving! We have been following the ancient Hebrew people's story as they were provided with a leader – Moses; as they ran from Egypt on the night of the Passover and as they discovered YHWH's providing of a pathway in the sea for them to escape Pharaoh's army. This week we listen to their need to trust God's faithfulness to provide enough food to keep them fit and healthy as they journey to the Promised Land. **Reasons** to give God thanks are sprinkled all through this experience of our ancient faith ancestors.

Giving thanks is the lead today's psalm offers us, that remembering and giving thanks because despite everything that had/ was and would happen; YHWH God was with them. The people's "God-with-them" lessons were hard and fast. Their *'first lesson was about leaving and their second is about believing.'

Aristophanes, 5th century B.C.E. said: "Hunger knows no friend but its feeder." As their story unfolds for us today we watch how once the threat of capture and or annihilation was destroyed – **literally** because Pharaoh's army was sunk over its wheels in mud or floating away on the sea, and so the people's focus narrowed down to daily need. And 'Food' topped the list! Today the land looks like this, so for us, it is not hard to begin to understand their difficulty believing YHWH God, who could beat armies and was with them they understood as a pillar of cloud – fire – was **also** capable of feeding them????

Who actually were they placing their trust, their lives? Who was this 'God' that Moses and Aaron were telling them to follow? *In my reading* this week I came across this reflection: ^{*1} "When God met Moses up on that mountain and gave him his assignment to bring the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt, Moses (perhaps gingerly) asked for God's name: just who - might he say - sent him on such a bold mission? While God's response is translated in various and interesting ways, most often as "I Am Who Am," one version is particularly fitting for our story today: "I will be who I will be." Someone has rendered this as "I will be **what is needed at the time.**" The wilderness in today's passage provides a perfect setting for God to be exactly that – just what the people need at that moment in time." CV

^{*2} Brueggemann says: "The one who provides the food we eat governs the loyalties we embrace." And do we not hear echoes in the complaints of the people, –from the relatively 'safe' position of a destroyed Egyptian Army that they could remember the 'pots of meat' and 'all you could eat' days of ... well of slavery but at least **we were fed!** they said to Moses and Aaron. And what is also heard – because we 'hear' more than the actual words said to us don't we, so what is also heard – is that Pharaoh was a better

* Brueggemann *The Covenanted Self*. ^{*1} K. Matthews Huey ^{*2} (Brueggemann *Cadences of Home: Preaching among Exiles*).

^{*3} John VandeLaar ^{*4} H Wallace

1= Regional % Worlds purchasing power 2= World Wealth 2013 3= GDP Growth 2010-2015

provider/ Pharaoh was safer → we knew the system → yes collecting straw to make an impossible number of bricks was really, really bad – but... **we were fed....** cV (1)

“The one who provides the food we eat governs the loyalties we embrace.” *2 This is a call to pay attention to what we eat and **who** feeds us. I want to say this is important not only in a physical sense but also in an emotional and spiritual sense as well. What are the connections between our loyalties and the source of our food? **Is it** Pharaoh and his system or is it *1 God, “who gives in abundance but calls us to walk in faith, in trust, **not** hoarding but sharing to make sure **everyone has enough**?” (2)

As we know, "Pharaoh" can represent more than a long-ago, long-dead historical king. "Pharaoh" is everything that traps us and keeps us down and draws us into a system that mangles the "**system**" of **God**, which tests us, perhaps, and lays great expectations on us: will we trust in God's providence? *1 'Will we share with one another? Fear and anxiety, ***which disable trust***, keep us strangely trapped and tied to the systems that oppress all but the few at the top. We find ourselves identifying with that system, whether we realize it or not: **are we** people of Pharaoh, **or** people of God?' Ccv (3)

Unfortunately *3 **it is** common for us to hoard our wealth for ourselves and share it only with our “allies” or those from whom we expect to receive something in return. **It is** also common for us to deny adequate resources to those with whom we disagree or from whom we can gain nothing. Because of this the world's resources, which are more than adequate to address the needs of the **entire** planet's population (our God **is** a generous God!) are not equitably shared, with the few enjoying more than they need, and the vast majority living with great lack and need. In the light of God's generosity, we cannot help but be challenged to change how resources are shared. cV

When God fed the people so long ago, he established that there was “enough” for the day for **all** of them. Like our Lord's Prayer, where we pray “give us this day **our daily bread**.” The resources the people needed were provided, and what I find more of a blessing is that time for rest and Worship are included. They still had to work – search for it just like they had to search for straw to make bricks once upon a time – in ***another's 'kingdom'***. But now it is for food – and on the 6th day they are to collect enough for the Sabbath. Given to them is a day of rest and worship; time to restore life's balance **and remember who** was looking after them / who was feeding them – and therefore to whom their life-loyalty was owed.

When the people demanded ‘food’, God gave ‘manna’ = ‘bread of heaven’ and in a way I suspect we totally understand the people ask **What! Is! It!** Remember they are only just liberated slaves, escapees, water-walkers! I wonder how much of a paradigm shift they are coping with, their God who apart from blessing them with abundant numbers, *from their perspective* remember, has been basically silent and not answering their prayers for some 400+ years, suddenly liberates them / destroys Pharaoh's army, provides a land bridge through the water / and now ‘drops’ manna from heaven to feed them. **In fact** the very day of registering their complaint with the ‘bosses’ – Quails arrive ‘by air’ at twilight.

This is the God who says ‘trust me’ – I will take you to the Promised Land! **It is hard** for them to let go of their anxiety, they have good reasons to worry and mis-trust and hesitate... They have not reached a point of trusting their leaders or that their leaders are led by God, *let alone* of **trusting God**. H Wallace says: “It seems that trust in such hard circumstances is not only a matter of adopting a sense of confidence in another but in letting go of the fears that so easily dominate from within.”

Can we let go of our fears and our own manna-insurance schemes to trust that God will provide enough? Our ancient faith ancestors tell us to remember with thanks that *4 God was with them and **did** provide. This is the gift of the psalm for us; remember and rejoice, **give thanks** for God **is** with us and in His faithful provisioning becomes our model to be both faithful ourselves and provide – like Him. Amen.

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