

“Give Us This Day Our Daily Whatchamacallit”

Exodus 16:1-36

Series - Exodus: ReOpening God's Way Week 2. Open Your Mouth

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Summer time makes me think of camping. Some of my favorite family memories were in a tent: hikes up to the bald spot on Bear Mountain where I could see to the edge of eternity, sunsets on Cranberry Lake with the sky on fire, songs, stories and roasted s'mores around a crackling campfire. Yet camping also means air mattresses that go flat in the night, tents that drip through a three-day deluge and outhouses that are too far when you need one and too close when you don't. And in the middle of the night, it sometimes dawned on me that a mere layer of vinyl, a half a millimeter thick, is all that stands between my family and a rabid bear, a deer stampede or Jason. One night Lisa said, “Doug, wake up! I think there's something outside the tent.” “You're right,” I whispered, “I hear something.” We listened some more. “I think it's a skunk,” she said. “Me too,” I replied. “I'll stay here to protect the kids while you chase it away.” Suddenly I discovered there was something more dangerous inside the tent. She was not a happy camper.

During the Exodus Moses leads the people of Israel on a long, hot, dry desert camping trip. So far it's been over forty days. They don't know it will last forty years. Nobody is a happy camper.

In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. Exodus 16:2

I can't blame them for complaining. The whole nation is wandering in the desert without food, water or shelter heading in the opposite direction from the Promised Land. I'm sure I would have lodged some complaints with the management.

Perhaps you'll identify even more with their plight when you hear the Hebrew word for grumbling *loon* also means to stop, to dwell, to stay some place permanently. So there is a direct connection between grumbling and stay at home orders. During the sixteen weeks since the shutdown we've all heard a lot of grumbles. “How much longer do I have to wear this mask?” “You're taking away my rights!” “Why aren't people social distancing – they're going to spread the virus!” “This is all a hoax.” “I've got to get out – I can't take all this family togetherness.”

We swim in a sea of complaints. Like fish in water, we don't realize how much complaining saturates our lives. To get his students in touch with how often they complain, author and teacher Hal Urban gives out a little assignment. Since 1972 he has issued the Bruce Diazo Memorial Challenge: starting right now go the next 24 hours without complaining about anything. “What did my students do when I gave them this assignment?” Hal asks. “They complained that it was too hard. How many people have been able to do it? A grand total of 5. It took 23 years to find the first one. Of the 5, 2 were high school kids, one a 7th grader, one a 4th grader and one was an adult. This means only one out of every 16,000 people given the assignment was able to complete it successfully.”¹ Anyone who tries to take a day off from complaining quickly discovers just how

¹ Hal Urban, Positive Words, Powerful Results, narrated by Nelson Runger, Recorded Books, c. 2004, cd1, track 21.

often we complain. Usually we complain about something here on earth. But there are times we get so frustrated with life we launch our grumbles, gripes and grievances at God.

What are wrong with complaints? For one thing they're **Not Always True**. Sometimes grumbling is exaggerated or nostalgic. It looks back at the good old days, the glory days. Yet when you seriously study the past you discover it wasn't all good or glorious. The Israelites did this.

The Israelites said to (Moses and Aaron), "If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death." Exodus 16:3

The way the Israelites describe their lives in Egypt you would think it was an all-you-can-eat buffet. In truth it was a life of misery, slavery and oppression.

This weekend we celebrate our Declaration of Independence. We want to look back to those good old days, those glory days. We proclaim on our national creed

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.²

This is one of the greatest declarations of liberty and equality ever penned. Yet the majority of the signers – 41 of the 56 – were slave holders including Thomas Jefferson who wrote these words. We are now engaged in a national awakening to the reality of racism. We cannot change the past but it is essential that we see the past more accurately if we hope to change the future. We must tell the truth of how systemic racism and all manner of prejudice block and deny our black neighbors and many others from their unalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. I am deeply grateful to our African American brothers and sisters who shared their experiences last Sunday and gave us suggestions for how to fight racism. This is only the beginning. We will provide resources so you can learn about racism as well as actions on how we can combat racism wherever it appears. It is wrong to nostalgically wish we could go back to the way things were. God is calling us as a church to move forward together. We must honor our flag and we must also fulfill the pledge we make to our flag and work to ensure liberty and justice for all.

In response to Israelite complaints, God provides food for His people. Yet the Lord also uses this as an opportunity to teach them important practices – practices which will help us in our journey to reopen.

Then the Lord said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days." Exodus 16:4-5

² <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>

In the evening the Lord covered the camp with quail. When they went out the next morning they saw a layer of dew sparkling like diamonds.

When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, “It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat. Exodus 16:14-15

So the people called it “manna” which literally means “what is it?” or as my college Hebrew professor said, “Whatchamacallit.” Every night they ate quail crochets and in the morning they prayed, “Give us this day our daily whatchamacallit.” Here are some crucial lessons God taught them with the whatchamacallit.

We Are Completely Dependent on God – The Israelites learn they rely on God not just for meat and bread but for everything. This weekend we like to proclaim our Independence – from everything. Americans are an individual and independent people. Yet even the Declaration of Independence declares our dependence on God. We are independent of the king of England, not the King of kings. Refusing to depend on God or to follow God is how all our troubles started in the Garden of Eden. We must stop playing king of the hill. Instead, let’s be grateful to God for all we have and glorify God with all we have.

Live One Day at a Time – The Lord tells each family to gather enough for one day. Once the hot desert sun rises the manna melts away. So even though God provides, there is still work for us to do. The Lord wants us to focus on today.

Then Moses said to them, “No one is to keep any of it until morning.” However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell. Exodus 16:19-20

Today is all we will ever have. Yet so often we miss today. Day after day passes by, children grow up, years disappear. Why do we miss Today? Two words: Yesterday and Tomorrow. When we dwell on the past and worry about tomorrow we miss living in today. Reminiscing about the past is fine. Planning and saving for the future is great. Yet stressing about the past or the future will make today stink like moldy manna. During this time at home, try to focus on today. Live in today.

God Loves All Equally – After the Israelites gather the manna there is another miracle.

The Israelites did as they were told; some gathered much, some little. And when they measured it by the omer, the one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little. Everyone had gathered just as much as they needed. Exodus 16:17-18

Some grab a lot of manna while others only get a little. Yet when they measure how much each family accumulates they all have exactly what they need – neither too much nor too little. Now that doesn’t happen in our world. A few gather way too much and many only get a little – just think back a few weeks to those who hoarded toilet paper. These verses show God desires each person to have what he or she needs. We are all becoming increasingly aware of how systemic racism and other forms of prejudice block people from earning and providing what they need for

themselves and their families. The manna shows us this is not God's will. We need to identify and dismantle racist rules so all may have the opportunity to enjoy the blessings of life.

Take a Sabbath Break – On one day of the week the Lord told them to collect double.

On the sixth day, they gathered twice as much ... (Moses) said to them, "This is what the Lord commanded: 'Tomorrow is to be a day of sabbath rest, a holy sabbath to the Lord. So bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning.'" Exodus 16:22-23

This is the first time God mentions the Sabbath. It will become a top ten commandment in chapter 20. Taking a day off was a completely new idea in the ancient world. But it was not new to God. He rested on the seventh day of creation as an example for us. Since nearly everyone is working from home during CoVid19 many feel they can't get away from work. This is not how God designed you. If you keep doing this you will burn out. The Israelites tried to skip the Sabbath

Nevertheless, some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather it, but they found none. Then the Lord said to Moses, "How long will you refuse to keep my commands and my instructions? Bear in mind that the Lord has given you the Sabbath. Exodus 16:27-29.

God gives us the Sabbath for at least two reasons: to refresh mind, body and spirit and to recharge your relationship with God. Another trend I've noticed is fewer people are setting aside Sabbath time to worship God and receive His strength. They are going into summer mode even though they aren't going away. They say they are tired of online worship services. The farther you get away from God the more spiritually exhausted and empty you will be. And you need spiritual strength to cope with all the challenges that come with the coronavirus. Take a Sabbath each week – rest, worship God and receive His strength.

Daily Feast on the Bread of Life. Centuries later, Jesus reminds the devil

People do not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. Matthew 4:4

In addition to daily bread, you and I need daily spiritual manna. What is this spiritual manna? Actually the right question is Who is this spiritual manna? After Jesus fed the 5000 with a little boy's lunch He said,

I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. John 6: 35, 51.

You and I need Jesus the bread of life which comes down heaven. Earthly bread keeps you alive for a day. The bread from heaven keeps you alive forever. Are you daily feasting on the Bread of Life in prayer, in Scripture, in worship, in fellowship, in service? Are you inviting others to come and feast on the Bread of Life? Open your mouth to receive the Bread of Life.

Earlier I gave you Hal Urban's challenge – starting now, go the next 24 hours without complaining about anything. So why does Hal call this the Bruce Diazo Memorial Challenge? He named it after a classmate he met back in his school days at the University of San Francisco. To this day he still says that Bruce is one of the most amazing persons he'd ever met.

Bruce was paralyzed by polio as a senior in High School just before the Salk vaccine came to his hometown of Fresno. When he arrived at USF he was in a wheelchair. The only parts of his body he could move were his hands, but not his arms, and his head. Inside that head was a great brain. And inside his heart was a great disposition. And no one ever heard him complain. All of us were in awe of how upbeat Bruce was. I asked him one day at lunch how he managed to be so positive all the time. His answer was simple, wise and profound. He said, "I didn't want to live the rest of my life feeling sorry for myself or being angry. So I decided to be thankful instead." I had to ask him what was he most thankful for. He said, "God, my family, my church, my friends, the university, my teachers, the brain I've been given and a life full of opportunities."

Bruce went on to graduate with high honors, earn a scholarship to law school and return to Fresno for a successful career as an attorney. Sadly his career and his life ended too early. He died when he was only 31. His frail body just gave out. But Bruce left a great legacy because he touched the lives of everyone who met him. I'll remember him for a lot of reasons. One is that he is the most thankful person I ever knew. He taught me one of the most valuable lessons I ever learned: to focus on the good in life and to be thankful for it.³

When you open your mouth what comes out? Grumbling or gratitude? Let's open our mouths and feed on the Bread of Life. Let's open our mouths and give gratitude not grumbling – one day at a time.

³ Hal Urban, Positive Words, Powerful Results.