

Exodus 16:1-18

The Book of Exodus tells its readers how God took pity on the Israelites, the means chosen to liberate them from the Egyptians, and their consequent journeys in the wilderness.

Some people have tried to find evidence within the Egyptian chronicles that the Israelites were present in Egypt in this period, but the lack of written material from that era limits any discoveries. What has been found in general terms is that foreigners did serve in Egyptian households; there were building programmes using 'apiru' or nomadic invaders, and foreigners did attain high service in important households. Rather than trying to prove historical fact, it is better to understand the Book of Exodus as 'historiography', that is, the remembered history of the Israelite people, which is crucial to their identity as the people of God.

Exodus is a mixture of very early oral material which came from different traditions and was assembled into the one book. Just as we have four gospels telling us about Jesus, the Jews have different memories of the same events. The stories and traditions are all mixed into the same book.

It makes sense that different communities, just as with NT communities, had different memories and emphases, which had become important to them.

So when the Scriptures are committed to writing, there is a desire to incorporate all the diverse memories of people and their experience of God within their lives.

The Book of Exodus is the beginning proper of the Israelite story. They are now more than an extended family, they are a “congregation,” a single body united by ties of kinship, and affiliation by choice on their way to becoming a nation. Israelite identity is very complex. They practice “internal” marriage, a euphemism for incest. Abraham marries his (half-) sister; his uncle Nahor marries a niece, Milcah. The desire to marry only within the family, sends Isaac’s servant in search of a blood relative, Rebekah.

In a generation, marriage patterns changed. Judah and Simeon produce heirs with Canaanite women. Joseph’s half-Egyptian children Ephraim and Manasseh will essentially become tribes in their own right. The scholarly designation for the ethnicity of ancient Israel is “Afro-Asiatic.”

To this multicultural mix is added an unknown number of persons of unknown ethnicity and nationality who escaped Egypt with Israel. All of these people are in the process of becoming a single nation. Ritual actions like circumcision and covenant ratification, will cement them together. Religious and cultural practices will help to differentiate them from other nations, with whom they will share land and a similar language.

This people, a mixed group of rag-tag slaves, have witnessed God's great power over Pharaoh on their behalf. This is a revolutionary act. Slaves are ignored and irrelevant in the course of history. Gods do not act for slaves, but for kings and empires. Yet, this Yahweh, this God, has turned the world and its rules upside down. It was a dramatic exit from Egypt with a rush of activity and a run to the wilderness. So they follow God and Moses.

But instead of celebrating their newly found freedom, the Israelites are faced with the reality of having no food. And being refugees in the wilderness, they are without the means to cultivate the food necessary to survive.

After experiencing the miraculous escape to freedom, it is easy to dismiss these former slaves as ungrateful and faithless. God has saved them, and here they are complaining. Yet, the biblical text does not condemn the people; God hears them and responds to their needs.

In this period of wilderness wandering, the “entire congregation” grumbles repeatedly against Moses and Aaron. In some rabbinic readings only the non-Israelite elements murmur or complain. The word “entire” is also a marker of inclusivity. No matter how they got there, they are becoming a singular people with a singular lament.

It may be tempting to condemn the lack of faith displayed by the Israelites, faith in the God who had demonstrated such great power. By this time six weeks had gone by since those miracles, six weeks since the oasis of Elim with fresh water and date-laden palm trees. Six weeks later and their promised land was nowhere in sight, and their provisions were being consumed at an alarming rate. And, the only thing the pillar of cloud and fire was leading them to, was more sand.

In this story God is both attentive and apparently exasperated. God's response to her whiny children will be familiar to many parents. Even so, God appears to take the complaint in stride, raining food from the sky. But this will be a test. Blind obedience is not always a virtue in our world. When such allegiance is placed in religious figures, it can be dangerous, even deadly. However, in the world of the Israelites, unquestioning obedience was prized and expected.

What would we do in their place? These folks are wandering in some of the most arid and barren real estate on the planet. To survive, the people will need to learn to depend on God for everything. The first step in their process of becoming a self-determining people is to learn to trust this God. Their bodies may be free from slavery, but it will take much more to free their minds and their hearts.

Central to this account of manna from heaven, is the belief in a God who will continue to take care of the Israelites.

God is not only the Deliverer, a God who liberates those who are in bondage, but God is also the God who provides for the people in the wilderness all the way to the Promised land. So God is portrayed as a God who hears the complaints of the people. God is a God who sees that the people are hungry, and most importantly, God is a God who acts to give the hungry Israelites whatever they need.

This is a God who responds extravagantly to needs of the people. "In the evening, quails came up and covered the camp." In this ancient world, "the average family ate meat only on festive occasions." In this non-producing, arid land, the people not only received meat, but did so on a daily basis.

The second gift is equally generous. At first glance, it does not appear like much. Twice the word thin, "as thin as frost," is used to describe this mystery. When the people saw it, they said to each other, "What is it?" Like God's unfathomable name, this gift will remain a question, not a certainty. This manna cannot be owned. If you gather a little, there is enough, and if you greedily gather up a great amount, there is still just enough, and if you gather just the right amount, it is the right amount.

This Yahweh is turning the rules of the world upside down! What about the Protestant work ethic? Hard work equals more for me. Not in God's world. God's world is one of equality for all. God reminds them and us, that work even in the kingdom, is not why God gives us our daily bread.

This emphasis on being completely satisfied by God's provision of food, has been instrumental in the rabbis' use of a nursing image to talk about the manna being as sufficient as a mother's milk is to her baby. The rabbis even imagined the manna changing flavours so as to offer some variation, inspired by the notion that the taste of mother's milk would be impacted by what the mother eats. The point of this creative expression is that God graciously offers all that the Israelites need. We are reminded in this Exodus story that there is a close association between the gracious gift of the manna and the glory of God that appears as a sign of God's presence. It is in God's gracious blessings that we experience that God is with us.

It is easy to see God's gifts as belonging to a long ago people, who are dependent on God. It is a nice story but probably has very little to do with us today. But, their lesson is **our** lesson. Part of understanding the biblical story as part of our story, is to learn the lessons presented by the story.

We tend to think that farmers and smart people assure our food supply. Yet, despite all of our ingenuity, it is God who has made a planet where the seeds awaken to feed the world. Just because something is part of our ordinary lives does not mean it is not miraculous.

Whether we see it or not, we depend on God for our daily bread, just as this wilderness generation did.

This world is full of a great variety of plants and animals that feed us all in a complex ecosystem. We are the ones who have made systems where food is more available in some places than others. God's plan is a table for all – a definition that turns our world upside down.

Once we understand the context, this story is not one where we should stand in judgment of our ancient ancestors, but one where we stand in their shoes and look around to see how God wishes us to order the world. God provides, and we are to take what we need. Greed and trust are incompatible. God still provides a world rich in resources, and we should marvel at this overabundance of God's gifts. Possibly, we react to the people's "complaining" because we know that we should never think of complaining, considering all the gifts and blessings we have.

God hears the complaints and acts. God acknowledges the insecurity and anxiety of the congregation and perceives its connection to their material, embodied needs. God's response is concrete and "down to earth" and promises to re-form the once-enslaved people in the daily and weekly rhythms of provision, labour, satiety, and rest. In the Exodus story, the reference to the culmination of labour and a double-portion of bread "on the sixth day" hints at a connection to the creation narrative – the day of rest by God and God's people.

The congregation will be shaped by the mundane, day-to-day work by which they respond to the divine gift that supplies their lack.

They will be created and re-created in routines of contingency, dependence, trust, and generosity. They are promised that by observing this routine they will come to know God as the one who freed them from slavery and sustained them each day in the wilderness.

It is important to recognize that God's provision of food occurs in a context of depravity. The fact that the Israelites are finding themselves in the wilderness with no food, reminds us of the reality of food shortage and famine, that for many people all over the world may be a life-threatening reality, quite often due to no fault of their own.

The recent effects of climate change, war, terror and globalization on the everyday reality of many people in places like Darfur, Nigeria, Sudan, Gaza and Syria challenge us to recognize that far too many people today do not experience the proverbial manna from heaven.

In his provocative contribution, theologian and author Walter Brueggemann takes on the "myth of scarcity" that one sees in the greed and the hoarding practices of the imperial policies of the Pharaoh of Egypt that is reminiscent of the economic monopoly of contemporary superpowers that we see play out in, for example, "greedy CEO salaries," in "so-called welfare reform," and one may add tax reform, which all speak of "the drive to privatize wealth away from care for the public good."

In contrast, Brueggemann challenges us to relearn the “lyric of abundance,” that believes that there is more than enough food to go around in God’s good creation. However, vitally important for this vision of *dayenu* – translated as “there is enough in God’s goodness” – is that each and every one of us must make sure that all members of the community take just what they need. No more, no less.

How do we do this? How do we make sure that all members of the community take just what they need, no more, no less? During my internship I was placed half time in a church and half time working with a social agency. The agency had a variety of programs, including counselling, a home for recovering alcoholics and community outreach. I was assigned to one-on-one counselling with a couple of single mothers and led several programs at the community centre. Most of the clients were single moms and recovering addicts.

The centre had arrangements with nearby farmers, who allowed the women to pick free food. So, some of the mothers would go picking apples or corn, while others stayed to watch the kids. They returned with bags and boxes overflowing with fresh produce. I watched them divide the harvest evenly, between those that did the picking and those that stayed to watch the kids. I watched them count out the cobs of corn so that everyone had the same amount and enough for her family. There was no grabbing more for oneself, no hoarding. This was a community, living in poverty, that knew what sharing really meant.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta shares this story: “Some weeks back I heard there was a family who had not eaten for some days – a Hindu family – so I took some rice and I went to the family. Before I knew where I was, the mother of the family had divided the rice into two and she took the other half to the next-door neighbours, who happened to be a Moslem family. Then I asked her: ‘How much will all of you have to share? There are ten of you with that bit of rice.’ The mother replied: ‘They have not eaten either.’ This is greatness.” All members of the community take just what they need. No more, no less.

The manna story warns against hoarding, against greed that capitalizes on this “myth of scarcity.” Instead it encourages sharing that is exemplified in the stories that tell of Jesus taking five loaves and two fishes, and after he had blessed the food, he broke it and gave it to feed a multitude of hungry people.

John’s gospel attaches all of its Eucharistic teaching, which involves a symbolic eating of the flesh of Jesus, and a symbolic drinking of the blood of Jesus, to the story of the feeding of the multitude. He goes to even greater lengths to identify Jesus with the bread that fell from heaven in the Exodus story. John has Jesus say: “I am the living bread which came down from heaven.” He goes on to contrast the bread that he offers with the manna in the wilderness. “The bread I give you,” John’s Jesus says, “is my flesh, and it will enable you to live forever.”

This inherently Eucharistic act continues the notion of the absolute sufficient nature of God's provision of food first evident in the story of the manna. The twelve baskets of bread left over after feeding the multitude of people symbolizes "abundance that overrides all of the fearful anxiety of the world." Similarly, we are called to embody God's provision of food by feeding those near and far who are in need, precisely because we have been fed by God.

We can imitate Pharaoh, and refuse to hear, or we can imitate God, and acknowledge and respond to complaints that are borne of hunger, lack, and crippling anxiety. With these realities in view, what are the daily practices and rhythms of life that will ensure food security, fair wages, equal opportunity, and rest for all members of our communities? Today, as we thank God for all our blessings, let us also give thanks for the opportunities we are given to respond to those complaints borne of hunger and need in our communities, near and far.

Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

OCTOBER 5, 2025 - 17th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

God, just as You rescued the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt, setting them free to worship and serve You, You have also rescued us, setting us free from slavery to sin and selfishness, and inviting us into relationship with You and one another. We praise You for the love and mercy You have shown toward us. You call us to love and serve You by loving and serving our brothers and sisters, near and far; to put their needs and interests ahead of our own, fulfilling Your law of love. And so, we offer our prayers for the world You created.

We pray for those who do not have what they need in order to survive; those without enough food and water, medical care, shelter, or security. Open our hearts to see the needs in our world, and to respond with your love.

Holy God, we pray for the world around us, for the many who continue to suffer and call out for help: for those without enough to eat in Sudan, East Africa, Gaze and elsewhere; for those caught up in violence and political uprisings; for those picking up the pieces after natural disasters, especially the Philippines where major flooding was followed by an earthquake.

We pray for all who suffer from physical, emotional and mental illness. We uplift Dawn Hill and Josh Hoey and we remember those in hospital and nursing homes and all who are known to us. Bring them healing and hope. Support all who are undergoing therapies and treatments including those with addictions. We pray for all who care for them. Give skill and understanding to all who work for their well-being.

Holy God, God of love, We offer our prayers for the world around us. We pray for those who find themselves in bondage: those forced into slavery or prostitution, those oppressed by governments or economic systems, those enslaved by personal addictions.

Holy God, we pray for those who refuse to participate in violence or injustice, who courageously stand up for what they know is right, regardless of the personal consequences.

Holy God, we pray for those who oppress others, who are unable to break free from cycles of violence and anger, who are no longer able to empathize with their victims.

Holy God, we pray for your church around the world, that it would be a living demonstration of your coming kingdom: offering hospitality to all, ready to help in times of need, showing love to friends and enemies alike, seeking to live in peace with all. Lord have mercy.

God of peace, we pray for peace in Ukraine, Israel, Palestine and Lebanon. We hope and pray that the hostages will finally be returned and the bombing in Gaza will cease and access to food will be available. May the current peace talks succeed. We pray for all leaders, that hearts would be changed and there would be a permanent peaceful ending to these wars. We pray for all those suffering in these wars – those who mourn, the injured, those living in fear. Bring us all hope, bring us all strength, bring us all peace. In your holy and life-giving name.

We pray for the millions of refugees and migrants around the world, looking for homes and safety, a place to dream and live in peace, free from wars, conflicts and violence. Protect and support all the homeless in our own communities and around the world. Help them find refuge and keep them safe.

We pray for Your church, the Body of Christ on earth. We pray that we would be a living example of Your love in our world, treating one another with compassion and respect, settling differences with love and integrity, bound together by our common allegiance to You. Open our hearts to see one another, and to respond with Your love.

We hold in our prayers; Dunbar Lutheran in Vancouver - Rev. Elina Singh, our BC Synod Staff and Synod Council. We pray for Pope Leo XIV; ELCIC Bishop Larry Kochendorfer, ELCA Presiding Bishop Yehiel Curry, Bishop Kathy, Bishop Anna, Anglican Primate Shane Parker, Bishops of the Moravian Worldwide church, Bishop Imad Hadda and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, our sister congregation San Juan Camino d'Esperanze and Pastor Ana Maria Jara, and Holy Trinity Lutheran in Port Angeles. We pray for all deacons, pastors, lay leaders, musicians and volunteers.

God, we long to do our best. Comfort us. Be a blanket for our souls. Hold us when we cannot hold ourselves. May we know, love, and serve you and each other in humility even when we cannot do all that we would like to do. In the meantime, may we hold onto your precious and beautiful name as we lean ever close to you. In your name, we pray.

Amen.

God in Community, make us all one Body, as we pray:

Our Father ...

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE
OCTOBER 5, 2025 - 17th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Merciful God, just as You rescued the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt, setting them free to worship and serve You, You have also rescued us, setting us free from slavery to sin and selfishness, unceasingly inviting us into relationship with You and one another. We praise You for the love and mercy You have shown toward us. You call us to love and serve You by loving and serving our neighbour, near and far; to put their needs and interests ahead of our own, fulfilling Your law of love. And so, we offer our prayers for the world, for Creation, and for all in need.

We pray for Your church, the Body of Christ on earth. We pray that we would be a living example of Your love in our world, treating one another with compassion and respect, settling differences with love and integrity, bound together by our common allegiance to You. Open our hearts to see one another, and to respond with Your love.

Holy God, we pray for the world around us, for the many who continue to suffer and call out for help: for those who do not have what they need in order to survive; those without enough food and water, medical care, shelter, or security; for those without enough to eat in Sudan, East Africa, Gaza and elsewhere; for those caught up in violence and political uprisings; for those picking up the pieces after natural disasters, especially the Philippines where major flooding was followed by an earthquake. Open our hearts to see the needs in our world, and to respond with your love.

God of peace, we pray for peace in Ukraine, Israel, Palestine and Lebanon. We hope and pray that the hostages will finally be returned and the bombing in Gaza will cease, and access to food will be available. May the current peace talks succeed. We pray for all leaders, that hearts would be changed and there would be a permanent peaceful ending to these wars. We pray for all those suffering in these wars – those who mourn, the injured, those living in fear. Bring us all hope, bring us all strength, bring us all peace. In your holy and life-giving name.

We pray for the millions of refugees and migrants around the world, looking for places to have homes and safety, a place to dream and live in peace, free from wars, conflicts and violence. Protect and support all the homeless in our own communities and around the world. We pray also for those sheltering on our church property. Help them find refuge and keep them safe.

Holy God, God of love, we pray for those who find themselves in bondage: those forced into human trafficking, slavery, sexploitation or prostitution; those oppressed by governments or economic systems, those enslaved by personal addictions or poverty. Support all who are undergoing therapies and treatments including those with addictions. We pray for all who care for them. Give skill and understanding to all who work for their well-being.

Holy God, we pray for those who refuse to participate in violence or injustice, who courageously stand up for what they know is right, who speak truth to power, regardless of the personal consequences.

Holy God, we pray for those who oppress others, who are unable to break free from cycles of violence and anger, who are no longer able to empathize with their victims.

We pray for all who suffer from physical, emotional and mental illness. We remember those who are homebound, in hospital and long term care facilities; those who are grieving loved ones; and all who are known to us. Bring them healing and hope.

We hold in our prayers; Dunbar Lutheran in Vancouver - Rev. Elina Singh, our BC Synod Staff and Synod Council. We pray for Pope Leo XIV; ELCIC Bishop Larry Kochendorfer, ELCA Presiding Bishop Yehiel Curry, Bishop Kathy, Bishop Anna, Anglican Primate Shane Parker, Bishops and congregations of the Moravian Worldwide church, Bishop Imad Hadda and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, our sister congregation San Juan Camino d'Esperanza and Pastor Ana Maria Jara, and Holy Trinity Lutheran in

Port Angeles. We pray that you bless the ministries of all deacons, pastors, lay leaders, musicians and volunteers.

We pray for our own congregation and those in our community who use our facilities. Help us to discern your vision and purposes for us and our property that all might be used to serve you and the needs of our community. Help us to trust that you are ahead of us preparing the way to our future.

Gracious God, guide us in our daily lives so that we may serve you with all of our hearts. May we know, love, and serve you and each other in humility even when we fall short of that which we would intend to do. Take our efforts and weave them into your eternal purposes. When we feel overwhelmed, discouraged, incompetent, fearful or weary, comfort us. May your infinite mercy and love be a blanket of love for our souls. Hold us with your strength when we cannot hold ourselves. In the meantime, may we hold onto your precious promises and the power of your Son's name as we lean ever closer to you. In Jesus' name, we pray.

Amen.

Our Father ...