

Manna from heaven

Who gets your attention in today's Old Testament story?

There's the Israelites.  
Moses (and Aaron)  
And God.

Let's start with Moses after all this sermon series is about him.

By this time in the story the Israelites have been brought out of Egypt, crossed the Red Sea and are now in the desert. (Don't be misled – the desert of Sin is the short name for the desert of Sinai)

The people are grumbling at Moses, complaining to him that they have no food. He's getting the blame (again) but on this occasion it's quite short lived because we read that God speaks to Moses with the solution.

If we learn anything from Moses on this occasion, it's keep calm, do as God instructed, don't take to heart the complaints being made.

Was your attention drawn to God?  
He is closely present in this situation.  
He hears the people grumbling and complaining and is ready with his solution. Not only does he fulfil his promise to feed the Israelites, but if you read the extended passage it tells of him drawing near to them in a cloud and revealing his glory. We learn that God is patient, gracious and ready to provide and is near.

Was your attention on the Israelites. How did you regard their part in today's story? Faithless moaners?

I think we should have some sympathy.

The people were in captivity for hundreds of years; generation after generation. They have no experience beyond the work of slavery and the living conditions they have always known. Encountering God in this way is new to them. Like people everywhere they can look at what they had through rose-tinted glasses. "*We used to sit around pots of meat, we had bread to eat*". Elsewhere they talk longingly about cucumbers which I've never understood as I'm not a great fan of the cucumber. Maybe they have forgotten that around the time Moses was born baby boys were being killed.

Bizarre as it might seem to us who can read the whole story, their situation in Egypt seemed better. We want to shout at them – "but you are free" - however freedom can be very scary when you have been a captive all your life.

The Shawshank Redemption is regularly listed as a top ten film. It tells of a banker unjustly imprisoned for a murder he didn't commit and the brutal regime of the prison he is in. But even though the prison is degrading, corrupt, dangerous and impersonal, long term prisoners begin to regard it as home and are very frightened to leave. One lifer almost commits another murder in order to stay at the prison. He is finally released, but the outside world is so confusing, and frightening he decides to take his own life. It's a story, but like all good stories is also a parable and contains a lot of truth.

The Israelites have never known anything other than slavery and the future seems uncertain at best. They are led by two brothers who don't seem to have much of a plan and their recent experience of God is still very new and they are starving.

Their hunger is soon satisfied. God is more gracious than they allow for.

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We can't really criticise the Israelites. Each of us can be hesitant about freedom and moving forward with God. Terry is in our minds and our prayers as he prepares for Ordination. I'm glad to say he is not taking this step full of his own importance but with a natural hesitancy that comes from the unknown. He's learning to live loved in a whole new situation. God will not fail him.

Today's story is God fulfilling his promises.

Some people believe that the Manna and Quail were natural phenomena, not so much a miracle, but a timely discovery that there was edible food in the desert. Others (and I am one) are happy to consider what took place was a miracle – but either way it reveals the same lesson.

God knew what he was doing.

If he led them to a place they would naturally find food it shows His caring provision and reveals his plans. If he led them to a place where there was no food and then provides it, how much more does it show his caring provision and his plan *to prosper and not harm* (to quote Jeremiah).

Last Tuesday the PCC met and our main topic for the evening was to consider Transforming Trinity, that's the vision we have for building and developing the church. In advance of this meeting I had attended an event that was all about funding and the speaker, a Christian with long experience of fundraising, made the point that financial miracles for churches are very very rare indeed.

Because we are familiar with the story of Manna from heaven and Jesus feeding the 5000, the miraculous catch of fish, water into wine and so on...it's tempting simply to plan for God providing everything that will be needed without having to do anything at all except pray that God will provide.

But today's story would contradict that notion. The Israelites DID have to do something. They had to go and collect.

The Miraculous catch of fish happened because they were fishing where Jesus told them to fish and the water into wine involved the servants working hard to fill the pots with water. We too will have to do the work a funding campaign will bring and we will pray God blesses us through the work.

God hears our needs, God meets our needs but not always the needs we say we have.

After the occasion when Jesus fed 5000 people, the crowd are keen for him to repeat the experience. They remember Moses and the Manna and figure that 40 years of free bread would do nicely. Jesus turns their attention to spiritual hunger and thirst and encourages them to have the bread that leads to eternal life. When asked for this bread he says "I am the Bread of Life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry and never go thirsty" Our spiritual need is met in Him. But as it says in a communion liturgy,

Lord God, as we come to share the richness of your table, we cannot forget the rawness of the earth.  
We cannot take bread and forget those who are hungry.

Today is the day for our harvest collection and as I was thinking about that I was thinking about a clip from Bruce Almighty. I often think of examples from the film Bruce Almighty because it was so very well written film.

Bruce is angry with God, so God gives him His power and Bruce makes a complete hash of everything. With the world going mad, he meets up again with God who says this to him.

Parting your soup is not a Miracle it's a magic trick.

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A single Mum, working two jobs and still finds time to get her kid to soccer practice – that's a miracle.

A teenager who says no to drugs and yes to an education – that's a miracle

People want me to do everything for them, but what they don't realise is, they have the power.

Do you want to see a miracle son?

Be the miracle.

As we bring our gifts, there is no mystery or miracle as to how they end up here. But when someone is at their wits end and has nowhere else to turn...the provision of food through the foodbank is a miracle to them. Do you want to see a miracle? Be the miracle.

Let us pray.

Lord we do believe in your miraculous intervention and have our own stories of when you acted extraordinarily in our lives.

Yet you call us to be the miracle for others in how we provide for their need. Grant us a generous Spirit and the desire for anonymity so that you are the one who is praised and our blessing is to be the body of Christ caring for others.

Amen.