

# Tasting Trust

## Exodus 16:1-5, 9-18, 35

Anyone want to confess that they have trust issues this morning? As early as the first days and months of life, infants learn about trust. Those who are fed regularly, changed, cuddled, and cooed, learn to trust their environment, learn to trust their caregivers – parents, adoptive parents, grandparents, loved ones. As early as age 3, children have developed a capacity to discern between who should be trusted and who should not. By the time we are adults, we have been disappointed by individuals, institutions, loved ones, friends, partners...and trust becomes conditional, earned, fragile.<sup>1</sup>

I was privileged to grow up in a loving household with parents who loved each other and loved me. It's easy for me to celebrate Father's Day because the number of loving fathers, grandfathers, and father figures are more than I can count. I was fortunate enough to be able to choose when I would begin to try to bear children with a partner who was committed to being an engaged co-parent at my side. I have a standing date with my dad each week to play tennis and catch up on life. When my dad texts me or calls – I answer immediately, eager to hear what he has to say, longing to get to connect with the man I admire and adore.

Several years ago, a couple I was preparing for marriage asked if I had noticed their absence on Father's Day, and to be honest I had not, (in the commotion of leading worship, preaching, and tending to those who are present, I do not frequently take note or become nosy about why someone is or isn't at worship).

He went on to say that he intentionally skips worship on Father's Day because his father was as uncaring as they come, and when he was around, he was abusive to both the son and his mother, and then he left, leaving them with nothing. He couldn't come to worship on a day that would celebrate dads or connect earthly fathers with God the father, because it was painful and so far beyond his experience of fathers and God. He had some choice words for his father, and they weren't appropriate for church. When we have been hurt, betrayed, attacked, especially by those who we care for and are supposed to care for us, the damage is lasting.

The Hebrew people were only out of Egypt for a month, and they had some trust issues: trusting God, Moses, each other. They had lived their lives enslaved, where their needs were the last to be considered. A generation prior those in power had become afraid of the number of Hebrew people in Egypt, and oppressed them. A genocide was ordered so that all of the baby boys would be killed at birth, and when the midwives refused, Pharaoh ordered the young boys be thrown into the Nile. Into this atmosphere, Moses was born, and as he grew, nurtured in Pharaoh's own house, he noticed the plight of the Hebrew people. When Moses led the people out of Egypt, even as Pharaoh's army was drowned in pursuit, the people's hearts were weak, their faith fragile.

Soon after the songs died down, the people grumbled, their anxieties and fears setting in. Their stomachs growled and they spoke up for fear of starving to death if they didn't. They may not have like the way of life in Egypt, but they knew what to expect and from whom. And then God provided water. Then Moses led them away from the place with the clean, sweet water, and they hungered. And they grumbled some more. And God provided manna and quail.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/life\\_stages\\_of\\_trust](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/life_stages_of_trust)

Manna is an interesting word in Hebrew, because it is a contraction of the words Man and Hu...which literally are the words that they asked when they walked outside and saw the flaky substance What is [Man] it [Hu]? *It is manna*. We sometimes use the word *manna*, in everyday vernacular to refer to an unexpected blessing at just the right time, but I think that familiarity probably diminishes the chaos and undermines the desperation the Hebrew people were experiencing.

When we hear, listen, and watch the stories of migrants, who journey hundreds and thousands of miles across the desert, climbing mountains, risking life and limb to find a life and a future for themselves and their family – I think we have a better understanding of what the Hebrew people's experience was like. They were in completely unknown territory. They didn't know how it was going to work out. They don't know who to trust or who to turn to. They don't know where their next meal will come from.

We still await the outcome of the hung jury in the trial of Humanitarian activist Scott Warren. Warren has worked alongside the people of No Mas Muertes, an organization in Arizona that journeys to where immigrants travel, finding a path into the promised land of the United States. This organization has a slogan that humanitarian aid is not a crime, and they deliver food and water to a variety of places to assist migrants making their way through treacherous terrain. I imagine to those migrants, the water and nibbles of food are manna in the wilderness.

Walter Bruggemann, in considering the plight of the Hebrews, says *"The first task is leaving; the second task is believing,"*<sup>2</sup> We face the same challenges, perhaps in different ways, and God is there, to be What God Will Be, as we face those challenges. And we struggle with leaving the comforts of familiarity even in places that hold us hostage. We work ourselves to the bone for the Pharaohs of the world, in order to provide for our loved ones.

Barbara Brown Taylor ties our understanding of manna to our sense of God's presence writing, *"What makes something bread from heaven? Is it the thing itself or the one who sends it? How you answer those questions has a lot to do with how you sense God's presence in your life. . ."* She goes on to say that *"If you are willing to look at everything that comes to you as coming to you from God, then there will be no end to the manna in your life. Nothing will be too ordinary or too transitory to remind you of God. The miracle is that God is always sending us something to eat. [providing] not what we want, necessarily, but exactly what we need: some bread, some love, some breath, some wine, a relationship with this ordinary looking man, who comes from heaven to bring life to the world."*<sup>3</sup> But, are we even open to receiving such gifts? Are we expectant? Are we hopeful? Are we trusting?

You see, we can get tripped up in our own trust issues with God when we start to prescribe to God what we need, specifically and then are disappointed when God doesn't do our bidding. We may stop praying altogether or leave church for a spell. If we are honest, in our hearts, we have found ourselves in the middle of the wilderness lashing out at a God who would allow us to flounder and starve to death! We seek to compensate for God's lack of action by hoarding that which we think we need or selling our souls to someone who promises to provide exactly what we want.

But like those Hebrew people, God has not forgotten us. God knows our needs, exactly what we are facing, and promises to show up for us. Sometimes God appears in ways we recognize and make sense, and sometimes God appears in a way that leaves us picky at flakes asking – What is this?

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.ucc.org/weekly\\_seeds\\_tensions\\_in\\_the\\_wilderness](https://www.ucc.org/weekly_seeds_tensions_in_the_wilderness)

<sup>3</sup> Taylor, Barbara Brown. *Bread of Angels*

I can only imagine who was the first one to taste the manna was. I don't know if it was Moses or his brother Aaron. I wonder if it was a father or a mother who tasted it, before giving it to their child. Or maybe it was a child. The manna in the wilderness was confusing, and yet it was a sign to all that God had not abandoned them, even when their trust was tentative at best. The first person who decided to eat, I imagine, immediately was struck by not only the flavor of the wafer-like substance with hints of honey, but they tasted the sweetness of trust blossoming in their hearts. They feasted on grace, abundantly raining down upon them, extending a lifeline and a future with hope.

It was not that long ago that I had the privilege to counsel a young man who wasn't sure that God's grace was available to him. He was lost in a wilderness of judgement taught to him by his church. He was discerning his sexual orientation and gender identity, and when he asked questions, he was met with disapproval and eternal damnation. At least, until we got to chat. I explained that I didn't think God left God's children stranded in the wilderness, and I had some new interpretations of the scriptures he had learned. We talked about Jesus, we talked about biblical interpretation, when I left he had more to think about.

He eventually decided that perhaps he could be a Christian and gay and perhaps he didn't need to end his life but could live it out and be happy. This interaction was one of many that I've been fortunate to share, when a reinterpretation of scripture has become like manna, somewhat confusing, but full of grace and hope.

In just a few weeks, I will march alongside many churches and clergy folk from throughout the Chicagoland area as we visually and verbally celebrate that God's love is for all. Particularly when LGBTQ youth are being kicked out of their homes, representing a high percentage of homeless youth, particularly when trans and queer folk are being murdered because of who they are, and particularly when people look to the church for direction and meaning, I could not consider NOT showing up. I have marched for many years now, and the thing that is most memorable about the Pride parade is when the line of churches come through – the crowds all resound with “thank you”s and tears. If you want to join me, I'd love to have company as PRCC is on the go. The number of people who seem to be hungry for a word of love and acceptance from God – is staggering. It's a gift to get to share God's love in that way.

Our siblings in South Sudan thought they had finally tasted sweet manna when on April 11, they successfully ousted Dictator Omar al-Bashir. Civilians have gathered and protested, trying to maintain pressure on the emerging leaders to provide a fair, civilian-led, democratic government that would cease previous practices of human rights violations. Yet, on June 3, a peaceful presence turned violent as leaders backed by foreign powers killed over 100 people, raped beat, and set fire to the protesters. With internet blackouts, and funding from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, our siblings are starving and looking for signs of manna.

Some of us will try to allow God to serve manna through our efforts, using our power at US citizens to get involved – in parades, in calling legislators, in sending funds, in pushing for immigration reform and compassion at the border, and some in music. Pete Seeger, folk musician who passed away in 2014, used his music to inspire resistance to injustice. In the words of President Barak Obama,

*"Over the years, Pete used his voice and his hammer to strike blows for workers' rights and civil rights; world peace and environmental conservation, and he always invited us to sing along. For reminding us where we come from and showing us where we need to go, we will always be grateful to Pete Seeger."*<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *"Obama memorializes Pete Seeger". USA Today. January 28, 2014. Retrieved January 28, 2014.*

While Seeger didn't always know what kind of a God he believed in, he used his gifts to sing and shine light into the world, providing manna for many.

Friends, I don't know what wilderness you find yourself in. There are plenty of places we end up lost. This next week, I have the joy of participating with many of you and our kiddos in Vacation Bible School, and we will consider stories of food and faith. It's no surprise that God often shows up at a meal. A friend of mine when inviting his church to receive communion, often reminds the community that in this meal we hear the three things we long the most to hear: I love you. I forgive you. Let's eat."

As we dine on whatever manna God has prepared for us, may we too taste the sweetness of trust in our Creator, who like a loving parent, is always trying to look out for us and provide what we need.

May we experience love. May we experience forgiveness and healing. May we dive in, not taking more than what is for us, and sharing with all the world, for our friends, our neighbors, our siblings in Christ are starving too. *"Taste and see – the Lord is good; happy are those who are able to trust in Him."*<sup>5</sup> Amen.

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<sup>5</sup> Psalm 34:8