

Dear Friends,

Exodus 16: 1-3

It had been a wonderful moment. Moses had led the people out of slavery and through the waters. The chariots that they had feared so much had been drowned beneath the sea. They would never see them again. The prophet Miriam's clear, strong voice had been raised in song. The women had picked up their tambourines and danced. Everyone was excited, exhilarated, euphoric. But this cannot last and the moment came when they had to move on. And when that moment came, they looked at each other and said, "What's next?"

And what came next was the wilderness. In the wilderness their bodies were scorched by the fierce sun of the day, and frozen by the bitter cold of the night. They felt hungry and thirsty. Very quickly they forgot how bad life in slavery had been. They started looking back with rose-coloured spectacles at their old normal. They remembered how they used to "Sit by the fleshpots" and eat their "Fill of bread". "Fleshpots" is a lovely word that was used in the Authorised Version of the Bible. Later translators have often stuck with it. In the minds of some it has conjured up visions of people indulging in all kinds of sensual pleasure. But it's not what the writer of Exodus had in mind. The word in Exodus simply means cooking pots in which there is meat. They remember having plenty of meat to eat. Their memories are playing tricks. Meat had been a rare delicacy. They had not been well fed.

Their memories tricked them in other ways too. They allowed important information to be lost in forgetfulness. So, they forgot how they had been smashed to smithereens by the crushing labour that was imposed upon them. They forgot the reason why there were not as many men amongst them as might have been expected. You know the reason. It was because so many of the baby boys had been murdered at birth or drowned in the river Nile. That was their old normal. But they had forgotten.

So, the people complained. And it was good that they were able to complain. It was a sign of their freedom. They had not been allowed to complain when they were slaves. But there was one point on which their complaints went too far. They accused Moses of bringing them into the wilderness in order to kill them. And Moses could see that this was not an accusation that they were bringing against him, rather it was an accusation that they were bringing against God. They were accusing God of wanting to destroy them. On that point they had totally misunderstood God. They had got God wrong. And their understanding needed to be put right. For God is not about harming you, destroying you or causing you to perish. God is about bringing you to life, making you flourish, making you abundant.

God therefore decided to give them evidence of this life-giving intention. One morning the people woke to find the evidence. It had fallen from heaven and was lying on the ground waiting to be collected.

God bless you,

Tony