

Dear Friends,

Exodus 16: 13-21

The people have brought their complaints to Moses. They say, "There is not enough bread to eat. You have brought us here to kill us with hunger". Moses knows that while on the surface they are blaming him, deeper down they are blaming God. They are accusing God of wanting to destroy them. They have got God wrong. God gives everything to make sure that you do not perish but that you have eternal life. They need to be given evidence of God's loving kindness.

One morning it happens. They wake, get up from their beds, and go out of their tents. There, on the ground all around them is a layer of dew. When the dew lifts, they see a fine, flaky substance, as fine as frost. They look at it and say, "What is it?" Moses says to them, "This is the bread that God has rained down from heaven for you. You may eat your fill of it".

There is however a problem. During four hundred years of slavery they have learnt bad ways. This is not their fault. It's hard to be your best when you are a slave. The worst of their bad ways are those of fear and anxiety. They have become fearful because of the harsh oppression they have suffered. They have become anxious because they have lived with scarcity. They have not had enough; not enough bread to eat, water to drink or straw to make the bricks for the building work demanded of them. When you don't have enough, you have to put everything into getting what you can. It can make you ruthless. It can stop you from thinking of others.

So, they have to be taught how to collect this bread that they have been given. God provides the guidance. "You are to gather as much as you need, enough for each day". Enough, not more than enough. If they follow these instructions there will be enough for everybody. If some don't follow the instructions and collect more than they need, there will not be enough for some of the others. That would be wrong. It's wrong for some to have too little. It's wrong for some to have too much.

In the story there is a miraculous balance that is built in to the collecting of the manna. Despite the guidance, some do gather more than they need, while some gather less. However, when it all gets weighed out, those who have gathered much have nothing over, while those who have gathered little have no shortage.

Somehow, some people do manage to get around the system. Because we all like to do that. Those who beat the system collect extra and put it away for another day. It does not work for them. When they come back to it, they find that it has bred worms and become foul. Poverty is offensive. Excessive wealth is also offensive, it can become rotten and stink.

I wonder if the miraculous sharing out of the manna was actually not so miraculous. Maybe someone at the weigh in, made sure that the food was fairly distributed, so that everyone had enough and could eat their fill. Today the sharing is not

happening miraculously. There is enough food for everyone but many are dying from hunger. We therefore need to make the arrangements at the weigh in to make sure that the food is fairly distributed. We need systems and policies to be in place so that everyone gets their share and no one goes to bed hungry.

In the wilderness the people were learning to let go of their fear and anxiety. God gave them bread from heaven and they learnt to trust. God gave them guidance about how to collect the bread and they learnt that things worked well when they were open to God and God's instructions. They were learning. God was getting somewhere with them. But fear and anxiety don't quickly go away. They find new hooks to lock into you. The people have bread, but what about water. They are no longer hungry but they are thirsty. Where are they going to find water in the wilderness?

God bless you,

Tony