***ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!***

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Texts: Exodus 16:1-8, 13-31, 35 and John 6:35, 48-51

Six weeks – it’s about the length of time between some report cards; it’s less than half a football season – unless you are in the Big Ten this year in which case it is 2/3 of a football season! If you are pregnant six weeks doesn’t get you over the morning sickness! It’s only 42 days! Lent is longer! Yet, that’s all it took for the people of Israel to go from being slaves in Egypt crying out to God for deliverance to being free men and women angrily denouncing God in the desert. In just six weeks the Israelites went from recalling Egypt as

*the land where we suffered oppression, pain, and suffering*

to

*that place where we sat with pots of meat and ate our fill of bread*.

In just six weeks the Lord went from being

*my God who is my strength and my salvation*

to

*the One who has brought us into this wilderness to kill us all with hunger*!

Forgotten were the memories of the plagues and the Passover, gone was the awe at the parting of the Red Sea and destruction of the Egyptian army, forgotten was the comforting presence of the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, gone was trust in Moses and in God. In just six weeks the whole world, including God, somehow changed for the Israelites as they moved from being the grateful people of God to the grumbling people of the wilderness. How could such change happen so fast?

In *Walking the Bible* Bruce Feiler journeys through the lands the Israelites walked and describes his experience of the desert:

*First, you get thirsty. You wake up thinking about water. You go to bed thinking about water. You walk, talk, and eat thinking about water. You dream of water. You wonder, “Do I have enough water? Am I drinking enough water? Where is the water?”… Go wandering in the desert, for days, weeks, or forty years at a time, and water becomes the most important thing, the only thing. Water becomes life….*

*Next you get hungry. And you stay hungry. Your first few days in the desert you have remnants of the city, a bit of chocolate, a cookie, an apple. You eat these in diminishing portions, and with increasing relish. You’ve outwitted the desert. You’ve brought the fleshpots with you. But then the desert wins. That piece of chocolate cake you’ve been saving melts. The cookie crumbles. The apple rots. You’re left to the ground, which is a cruel resort. You’re left to your provisions… Traveling in the desert would be ideal for five-year olds: Every meal you eat is identical. Inevitably, though, the routine tires. The sameness grates. It’s then, as with water, that food becomes more. It becomes metaphor…Food like water becomes a metaphor for salvation….*

*Finally, you get tired. You get tired of the heat. You get tired of the cold. But mostly you get tired of the sand. Sand is relentless. It goes through your shoes, through your socks, and lodges between your toes. It seeps through your pants, through your underwear, and gloms on to places it ought never to see… It infiltrates your food, sticks onto your teeth, and passes eventually into your stomach… Sand in the desert is like rain in Britain: Sometimes it storms, sometimes it sprinkles, but most of the time it just hangs in the air and waits for you to walk into it. Thus sand, like water and food, becomes cause for misery. And out of this agony comes meaning. “The wilderness is the most miserable of all places,” the sages said. Spend enough time in the desert, and you begin to see that nothing is quite what it seems to be. Water becomes wisdom. Food becomes salvation. And sandstorms become poetry… By its sheer demands – thirst, hunger, misery – it asks a simple question: “What is in your heart?” Or, put another way, “In what do you believe?”*[[1]](#endnote-1)

What happened to the Israelites in those six short weeks was the desert! It challenged them with those profound questions: *What is in your heart? In what do you believe? In whom do you trust?* And they had no answers. The desert had wiped clean their memories of the God who had delivered them; they knew only that they were hungry and no food was in sight. They felt abandoned and desperate, so they whined and wailed about their empty, sandy stomachs.

A survivor of the siege of Leningrad described the grim conditions in that city in the midst of the siege. People were dying left and right for lack of food. The relative value of things changed overnight. People traded diamonds for loaves of bread; the bread was more valuable. Others who refused to part with their jewels died of starvation on their beds with their treasures tucked under their pillows, too weak from hunger to rise.[[2]](#endnote-2)Similar stories have arisen from the early days of this pandemic when store shelves were empty and food pantry lines were long and getting longer. In the wilderness, in Leningrad, and in some places in the early days of this pandemic people wondered if the Lord had abandoned them to die of hunger.

Lest we think this sentiment is peculiar to the extraordinary moments in history, consider these statistics from the Borgen Project, There is more than enough food produced in the world to feed everyone on the planet and yet:

* About 842 million people worldwide go to bed hungry each night.
* About 9 million people die of hunger each year; a third of those are children – that is about 24,000 people and 8,000 children a day [[3]](#endnote-3)

In this hour we take to worship, another 1,000 people and 300 children will die for lack of the basic necessities of life. In this nation, over 11% of households have food insecurity issues.[[4]](#endnote-4) To paraphrase one columnist on the economics of the poor: *A rising tide can’t float the boats of those who have no boat*.[[5]](#endnote-5) Now if you were without a boat or a crust of bread or a drop of water in the wilderness, then you too might wonder whether the Lord had abandoned you to die. Life looks a little different from the perspective of the hungry poor in any age!

The Lord did not abandon the Israelites. The Lord heard their desperate desert cries. Perhaps God understood how harsh the desert was, for God did not judge them harshly or demand repentance for their lack of faith. God simply answered their pleas and promised them food: quail in the evening and manna in the morning. There is little said about the quail beyond that first evening. But the manna appeared each morning with the dew: fine and white, flaky and sweet – like wafers made with honey. The people had never seen such a thing, had never tasted such a thing, and so they called it manna, which means, *what is it?* For forty years they walked out of their tents in the morning, pointed at the ground and said, *“Look! What is it?”* For forty years manna was the daily sign of God’s faithfulness – a life-giving sign that filled their stomachs and their souls. Each person had enough for each day, every day.

There were some skeptics among them. Some doubted that the manna would come day after day; so they gathered extra, only to find it wormy by morning. Some doubted that the Lord would cease to rain manna on the Sabbath as Moses had said, and went looking for it, only to find that there was none. For those skeptics, the word of the Lord was not enough. They had to see for themselves, and what they saw was this: each day there was enough for each and every one - not more, not less – and on the day before the Sabbath there was a double portion so that the Sabbath might be observed without the labor of gathering it. Day after day for forty years, the people were fed by the holy *what is it?.* Their very lives were wholly dependent upon the grace of God in a tangible way. Manna assured them that in a God-forsaken place – the desert – God had not forsaken them. God gave them enough!

Is *enough* enough for you? We live in a culture that says it is not enough to have enough; we need more. We need more things, more money, more house, more shoes, more food. We super-size meals to the detriment of our health. We accumulate things we don’t need to clutter our homes. We fill our minds and our days with more than our schedules can handle, with nary a thought of a Sabbath. And still we are tired and hungry and anxious – and often whiny. “*True abundance*,” writes William Cavanaugh, “*is realized by emptying the small self into the larger reality of God’s superabundant life*.”[[6]](#endnote-6) Jesus says it this way, “*I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never hunger*.”

The living bread of which Jesus speaks satisfies a hunger that we cannot always name and offers the same assurance as the manna in the wilderness – we are not forsaken by God. God remembers us. God loves us. God provides for us. God is with us. God saves us. Regardless of how God-forsaken the place or time, God is there. In Gulf coast floods and Oregon fires this week, God is there with the bread of life. Amid the ongoing chaos in war-torn Syria and Afghanistan, in India and Israel and Indiana suffering rampant coronavirus cases, God is there. Amid political deceptions and polarizing rhetoric and doomsday forecasts, God is here. In the midst of this pandemic God is with us, to reassure and sustain us as we ***hunger*** for something more than what we have – a return to normalcy, a respite from the virus, a vaccine to keep us safe, hugs from our friends; God is there to fill the void in our lives when we ***thirst*** for something meaningful and trustworthy amid the chaos; and God is there to support us as we ***brace*** against the desert winds that have blown viral sand all over our lives. Day after day God is there, in tangible and intangible ways, reassuring us and strengthening us for the challenges of this day and the days to come. Like the Israelites we are wholly dependent upon the grace of God. We may be too proud to admit it, or too foolish to acknowledge it, or too oblivious to give thanks for it, but we are dependent upon the grace of God all the same.

“I am the bread of life,” says Jesus. I sustain you day to day, in life and in death. I am the bread that satisfies your hunger. I am the living waters that will quench your thirst. In a mystery of faith that may leave you wondering with the Israelites, *what is it?* I have redeemed you, says Jesus. For what ***it*** is, he says, is the grace and love of God made flesh for you. What ***it*** is, is God’s love for the world, God’s redeeming power at work in our midst, God’s victory over sin and death that affirms that there are no God-forsaken places. Like manna in the wilderness, Christ is God’s firm assurance that wherever we are, even in a pandemic, even in the desert, even in the throes of death, God is there, offering us life and hope and peace and the bread of life; that, my friends, is more than enough for all of us! Amen

1. Bruce Feiler, *Walking the Bible*, HarperCollins: New York, 2001, pp.277-279 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. *All Things Considered*, National Public Radio, January 27, 1994 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. <https://borgenproject.org/15-world-hunger-statistics> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. <https://usafacts.org/data/topics/people-society/poverty> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Eugene Robinson, “No Longer Invisible”, *The Washington Post*, September 9, 2005, p.A25 [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. William Cavanaugh, “When Enough is Enough”, *Sojourners Magazine*, May 2005, p.14 [↑](#endnote-ref-6)