

## **16<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**

“Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.”  
— Søren Kierkegaard

### Exodus 16:2-15

The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” Then the Lord said to Moses, “I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not.

In his book, “Beginnings Without End” author Sam Keen asked this question: “Why is it people prefer known hells to strange heavens?”

Ever since I first read his words, I have been reflecting on that question.

We humans have tendency to romanticize our past, while living in the present and unsure of the future. The post-WW II, the 1950s and 60s, has often been considered one of the best periods of time in our nation’s history. Some longingly want to return to this time when they felt Americans were on top of the world. Yet, if we are honest, and many of you remember some or all of those years, they weren’t all that great. Poverty and hunger were on the rise, there was a war in Korea, followed by Vietnam all dealing with the fear of Communism infiltrating “our great way of life.” This gave rise to Red Scare which was embodied through the fear-mongering tactics of Wisconsin’s own Sen. Joe McCarthy. White Supremacy and the Jim Crow laws worked to suppress people of color’s right to vote, lynchings were far too common throughout our nation. Women were still fighting for the right to work outside of the home, and be treated as equals and not as submissive servants to their husbands.

When we talk about America’s past, wanting to return to a period of time when it felt like Americans had everything they needed and ruled the world, well, it is romanticized lens we are looking back through at a way of life that never really was.

The same can be said of the Israelites, who having once come into Egypt to live at the invitation of Jacob’s son, Joseph, found a very a different life once he died. Oppressed, abused, enslaved, and forced to work by their taskmasters, they cried out for deliverance, and hearing their cries, God sent Moses to lead them out of that hell hole they had been suffering in with the promise of a new future.

You would think they would remember that, wouldn’t you, but no, they wanted to believe a false narrative that they had created in their minds about their former lives.

We humans have short-term memories. Here they are in the wilderness, hunger overtakes them, fearing that they will starve to death, the people begin complaining to Moses, Aaron, and God: “If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”

“Why is it people prefer known hells to strange heavens?”

Yet, as much as the people complained, longing for a past that never was what they remembered, God was with them, providing for their current needs, feeding and caring for them while inviting them to consider the stranger new promised future they were journeying towards together.

Then the Lord said to Moses, “I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not.”

When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, “It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat.”

For me, this story offers us a chance to do some honest reflection on the “Pandemic Wilderness” we find ourselves as we sit outside in our parking lot, hungering for normalcy again, wanting to get back to the way things were for us.

Why is it people prefer known hells to strange heavens? Okay, maybe we would not consider what our lives were like pre-pandemic as “hell” but maybe it wasn’t the best of times.

Sonja Renee Taylor offers this excellent reflection for us: “We will not go back to normal. Normal never was. Our pre-corona existence was not normal other than we normalized greed, inequity, exhaustion, depletion, extraction, disconnection, confusion, rage, hoarding, hate and lack. We should not long to return my friends. We are being given the opportunity to stitch a new garment. One that fits all of humanity and nature. What we have been forced to leave behind we needed to leave behind. What is getting us through is what we will need to take forward, all the rest is up to us. DREAM. While have so much time. DREAM of the life you want. DREAM of the world you desire to exist in. Look for the places in your new dreams that have parts of the old world and remove them. What is the dream then? From there we can add to the collective weaving of whatever it is that is next. If we are gonna heal, let it be glorious.”

I can hear Moses saying this to the Israelites. It is also what Sam Keen meant in his words: “Why is it people prefer known hells to strange heavens.”

Taylor words fit with the Exodus story. They also like Keen’s words, speak to our story in Christ of death and resurrection. Our church body will die to our old way and beliefs, and through following Christ into the darkness of death, be raised to a new life together.

God is hearing the cries of people, and raining down bread from heaven to meet our needs, feeding our hungry souls, calming our anxieties and fears, and showing us a way forward - into a strange new way of being the people of God, and the Church.

The question for us is to do we trust in God enough to eat of this sacred bread, dress ourselves in the new garment of humanity, and follow Christ into a glories new future, or will simply stay here, longing to go back to past that wasn’t all that great?

Why is it people prefer known hells to strange heavens?

Why do you think they do? Amen.