Exodus 16:1-21
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How Firm a Foundation

Following Moses' encounter with the burning bush in last week's text, at God's direction and with his brother Aaron's help, Moses confronts pharaoh, demanding that pharaoh let his people go. After plagues of frogs, locusts and more, the angel of death moves through the land taking the lives of Egypt's firstborns and passing over the Israelites'. And pharaoh relents. The Israelites walk through the parted Red Sea on dry land into the desert, and they are free. In chapter 15 of Exodus, Moses and his sister Miriam lead the people in singing and dancing as they celebrate and give thanks for God's mighty work of salvation. They rest at a lush oasis called Elim, with twelve springs of water and 70 palm trees. [Read Exodus 16: 1-21]

I have to keep telling myself that when our passage begins, the Israelites have been out of Egypt for only 45 days. And 45 days is an extremely short amount of time to unlearn the patterns and habits and memories and stories that arise from generations of enslavement and oppression. I have to keep reminding myself of this fact because otherwise I am quick to roll my eyes at the Israelites' grumbling, which sounds a lot like whining. Moments before, the Israelites were

dancing and singing about how great and powerful God is, and now they're longing for the three, square, protein-packed meals they received on the daily back in Egypt. They're grumbling, murmuring, and yes, even whining. AND they're hungry and terrified. They don't know how to do this. They have not lived outside of Egypt before. They have no memory of what it looks like or feels like not to have their every moment dictated by pharaoh for pharaoh's agenda. And God responds not by reprimanding them or rolling God's eyes, but by promising to rain down bread for them.

The bread—or manna—will fill their bellies, and it will teach them something too. God says that the people are to collect what they need each day for five days. On the sixth they are to gather enough for two days for each person. With these simple instructions, the rhythm of life changes, and their story takes a turn. They will have enough for each person every day, including the seventh day, which will become a day of rest for everyone. Stockpiling isn't necessary and hoarding won't work. God is determined to teach them a new story, to shift the people from a place of scarcity to an understanding of what it is to have enough. And the promised enough will come from the hand of God, predictably, reliably, faithfully. They haven't lived like this before. Pharaoh may have filled their bellies with regular rations, but those rations were not due to pharaoh's generosity.

Pharaoh needed full bellies to ensure that the work of building more pyramids to stockpile more grain got done as quickly as possible. Pharaoh was all about controlling food so that he could control everything and everyone else. God, on the other hand, is all about shaping a people with love, trust, generosity, selflessness, and mercy. In God's economy, everyone has enough regardless of age or ability. Period.

Today marks the first Sunday of our monthlong stewardship celebration when we are invited to pray and reflect on who God is calling us to be and how God is calling us to give of ourselves and our resources of time, talent, and treasure in the year ahead. The Stewardship committee has planned a month full of opportunities to fill our bellies and share in fellowship, giving thanks for the way God has given so much to us in and through this community. Yes, you are being asked to consider what amount of money you will pledge toward the work of this congregation in 2026. And this month of celebration also offers us an opportunity to consider who God wants us to be individually and collectively, to revisit the ways God is calling us to live and move and share and serve in God's good world.

This year's theme is "Building a House for God," drawing on the story of Solomon building the Temple, a story we will read in a few weeks. I am not handy.

I helped paint trim for a Habitat House a while back, I've stripped three layers of wallpaper from plaster walls of a 100-year-old bungalow, and I helped build cinder block walls for a pastor's house in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico over twenty years ago. I pray those walls are still standing, because I am no expert on construction. That said, I have watched enough of *This Old House* and *House Hunters* to know that foundation issues are a big deal. Everything else can be lovely and perfect, but if the foundation isn't solid, the house cannot stand, and my realtor friends would advise me to walk away. In other words, the foundation is crucial.

God does not simply snap the divine fingers and plop the Israelites down in the Promised Land to stand on their own feet and wits and gumption. No, God feeds these stubborn, hungry, frightened, courageous, grumbling, beloved people faithfully each and every day for 40 years, laying a firm foundation of divine faithfulness, a foundation that cannot be cracked or shaken, no matter how fickle or faulty the people may be. God's relationship with the people was renewed at the Passover and forged when God called frightened feet to walk where the waters of the Red Sea had been minutes before. This same relationship is made and remade as God feeds the wandering ones day in and day out without fail. And this becomes their foundation for a new life in a new land, and it becomes our foundation, too, the foundational story upon which everything else rests.

And while we may tell ourselves other stories, the truth remains that we do not free ourselves, nor do we sustain ourselves. We stand here first and foremost because God has been faithful. Every time we gather at this table, we tell and re-tell the story of God's gifts to us and to all, gifts of redemption and new life in Jesus Christ, gifts of bread and wine, grace and mercy, gifts we do not and cannot earn, gifts never intended to be stockpiled or hoarded, gifts that are ours to share because they were first freely shared with us. This table is not our table, nor is this story merely our story. On this World Communion Sunday, we are reminded that this meal spans generations and continents. We are no more loved and no less loved than our siblings down the road or around the world. At this table we celebrate that there is enough for everyone in God's household regardless of ability, party, nationality, gender, age, race, zip code, or income bracket.

God is still giving us our daily bread, still determined to show us that there is enough—enough food, enough grace, enough mercy, enough love for all of us and all of them, whoever they may be. There are loud, persistent voices who tell us to hoard all we can, to distrust the others who are hungry and frightened like we are, to romanticize the steady and all too familiar meals of oppression and hate. But fear, hatred, division, and disregard make for a shaky place to stand, let alone build anything of worth. And so by the grace of God, we are invited to

return to the holy firm foundation laid for us in the wilderness. Once again we turn away from the pharaohs of the world, we look for a glimpse of the holy One in the wilderness ahead, and we choose once more to plant ourselves and all that we hope to build and become on that One's faithfulness. For God and God alone is the One who loved us into being, the One who comes to save us from all that enslaves us, the One who showers us with abundant enough over and over and over again, the One who promises us a future with hope and promise, the One who even now invites us to come and eat. How firm a foundation, indeed.

Thanks be to God. Amen.