

SUMMARY: FREED FOR PURPOSE!

Exodus 16:2-15

Our Church Board has decided it's time for us to begin in-person meetings again. This will be on a trial basis for the month of October. We will be offering two services, at 9.30am and 11.00am.

It will be very different from what we know with all necessary safety protocols in place, and while some may not be comfortable with coming together so soon (*or it may not even be appropriate for others because of health or other vulnerability concerns*) we do feel that we need to try.

We are only allowing 35 congregation at one time and will be keeping a registry for contact tracing if necessary. Please go to our website to register if you intend to come, or phone Jillian in the church office if you'd like some help in registering.

We look forward to seeing you again, even if it does have to be over your mask ☺

Over the last two weeks we've been speaking about God as the One who freed the people of Israel from Egyptian bondage. We've made the not too difficult connection between them and their circumstances, and us – and our circumstances. That *STILL IS* how God works, and *STILL IS* what God does - *God is in the freedom business!*

But now they are in the desert. They're far from what had been familiar: life in Egypt wasn't great, but at least it was predictable. They knew how things worked, what to expect. I am drawing freely in today's message from Will Willimon's commentary on this text¹. He writes how: *after 400 years of slavery, they would have known the boundaries, the expectations: The master fed and housed them in order to protect the master's investment. Yes, they were utterly without freedom and therefore without agency, powerless. But that meant they didn't need to think much about tomorrow – their lives and futures were in the hands of the master. But now they were free, what now?* So much was unknown! And this desert living was brutal!

And so they started doing what we know BEST to do when we are under stress – complaining, and of course, they aimed their complaints at their leaders: Moses and Aaron.

I'd like us to spend some time thinking about what was behind *their* and behind most of *our* complaining whenever we are tempted to be frustrated with God. I wonder to what extent it's about control, that *WE* have decided that *WE* are the ones in charge of our lives and our frustration is usually when things are not working out according to what we have decided is best for us? So often, I suspect, we feel we must go ahead and make our plans – and they're usually for the betterment of just ourselves and our loved ones of course - but then, because we call ourselves faithful, we expect God to keep God's side of the bargain: make our plans work! It's when, in our estimation, they are NOT working as we've intended that we become grumpy and start complaining! Sure, God still delivers us, but what if our delivery is NEVER simply about the satisfying of our ego-desires and whims, NEVER simply about empowering just OUR agendas, so much as to release us toward the fulfilling of God's agendas?

We've all heard how we should "*Be careful what you pray for, you might get it.*" Theologian Stanley Hauerwas describes how: *there's a curious sense in which it's easier to give a gift than to receive it. When we are the gift-giver, we are in a position of power.*

We control the exchange. In giving a gift, we are making a claim upon the receiver. When we are a gift-receiver, we are indebted to the gift-giver. The giver of the gift now has power over us. We are the recipient.

And so God chose to react to the complainers by promising to provide even MORE for them: to ‘**make bread rain down from the sky**’ (v. 4). ...and the gifts just keep on coming!

With the gift comes a burden! For the people of Israel the gift was their freedom - which brought with it the burden of their God-given responsibility! They got to be free as God defines their freedom: Freed BY God! Freed FOR God! I understand that the word ‘*Manna*’ *actually means, “WHAT? What is it?” Perhaps any time God gives any of us an undeserved, miraculous gift, we ought to ask ourselves (as we ask God!), “WHAT? What is it?” (Willimon)*

In Christ we have all been set free from whatever keeps us small & falsely defined to whatever we believe would be best for ourselves in our circumstances! But now that soul-part of our best selves has been exposed to Christ we’ve been released! ...brought out from the ego-shadows where life so often forces us to keep our truest selves hidden! As Christ-followers we are NOT the same! We’ve been commissioned! God wants us to work God’s will out on earth as it is in heaven, and to work it out through us! Christ’s own resurrection power is what we draw on to celebrate our deepest, most innate freedom! ***Set free by the Son we are free indeed!***

But again, we must make no mistake here, it’s never free simply to be whatever we may choose, we are set free for a purpose! I repeat: **Our delivery is NEVER simply about the satisfying of our ego-desires and whims, so much as our being released/empowered toward the fulfilling of God’s agendas!**

What do you sense is God’s agenda for you in this next phase of your life? ***What God-given, Christ-secured, HS-sealed gift of yourself are you still not properly receiving – you know - in a empower you towards that agenda?***

God has SUCH plans for us and for how best to use us to further God’s plans for the world... May our response to Christ be about us moving in freedom from anything and everything that gets in the way of our knowing and living into those plans.

May it be so, for now, for always

In Christ’s Name

Amen

Rev Robin Jacobson

ⁱ All red italic sections are quotations and paraphrases drawn from his commentary in Ministry Matters.