

## TAKE TIME OUT – *Pastoral Retreat*

Half Acre, Horton Heath, Wimborne, Dorset, BH21 7JS  
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### Sunday Scriptures: 1<sup>st</sup> August 2021

#### **Scriptures:** NRSV

#### **Exodus 16:2-4, Manna from heaven**

<sup>2</sup>The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. <sup>3</sup>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.' <sup>4</sup>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.

#### **Exodus 16:10-15: Meat & Bread**

<sup>10</sup>And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud. <sup>11</sup>The Lord spoke to Moses and said, <sup>12</sup>"I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I Am the Lord your God'." <sup>13</sup>In the evening quails came up and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. <sup>14</sup>When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. <sup>15</sup>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.'

#### **John 6:24-35: "I Am the Bread of Life"**

<sup>24</sup>So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor His disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus. <sup>25</sup>When they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, "Rabbi, when did You come here?" <sup>26</sup>Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. <sup>27</sup>Do not work for food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on Him that God the Father has set His seal." <sup>28</sup>Then they said to Him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" <sup>29</sup>Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent." <sup>30</sup>So they said to Him, "What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe You? What work are You performing?" <sup>31</sup>Our ancestors ate manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.' <sup>32</sup>Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. <sup>33</sup>For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." <sup>34</sup>They said to Him, "Sir, give us this bread always." <sup>35</sup>Jesus said to them, "I am the Bread of Life. Whoever comes to Me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in Me will never be thirsty.

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#### **Reflection:**

Some things never change; some people never learn, and the worst offenders are the people of God! To understand what Jesus is saying about being 'Bread' and 'Water', we must go back to the wanderings of the Israelites in the 'Wilderness of Sin' (Exodus 16:1-16 & 17:2-7). Their deliverance from Egypt was only one and a half months ago and already they are complaining and romanticising about past times. They were not satisfied with rationing their preserved stores, demanding fresh meat and fresh bread in plenty. God answered their request but this was not enough and they subsequently demanded fresh water in abundance too! Let us consider for a moment what God had just delivered them from and the miraculous way in which He enabled their release, then guided and protected their escape. It would be impossible to attribute this to anything other than the hand of God, which should have given them

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strength of faith beyond measure. What a blessing it would be for such a demonstration of God's miraculous hand to be seen at work today! Surely it would bring people flocking back to the church in awe, wonder, and praise...*or would it?* Looking back at the relationship between God and His people we can identify a repeating pattern: **1}** God blesses His people, who thank and praise Him for His providence. **2}** peace and abundance prevails; slowly but surely the people become complacent and descend once more into idolatry, debauchery and all manner of sin against God. **3}** God has to discipline his people in a way that can only be understood as His hand. He has to shock them into facing the reality of their wrongdoing and the need for repentance. **4}** God's people acknowledge the Truth of their sins and repent; once more thanking and praising God for His grace and love...and so peace and abundance reigns once more. It is a sad fact that: we have the Word of God to keep us in a right relationship with our Creator; we have the example of Jesus to teach and demonstrate how God works and what our heavenly Father wants of us; we have the gift of the Holy Spirit to guide us into all Truth; yet still we arrogantly believe we can ignore His Word, flout the rules, and follow our own desires without consequence. Who are we trying to kid?! God is omnipotent and omnipresent; that is in all things in all places at all times...God knows! *Do we remember to thank and praise God for His providence? Are we dissatisfied with what we have and given over to complaining? Is it time to face the Truth of our sins and turn to God in repentance?*

Difficult circumstances, conflict, and broken relationships, all cause stress. When we find ourselves facing such trials, we tend to complain instead of entering into dialogue. We look back to the 'good old days' but our memories do not always paint a truthful picture. Psychologically, we accentuate the positives and downgrade the negatives to placate our dissatisfaction and massage our ego's. What we should be doing, as the people of God, is turning to our heavenly Father in prayer and trusting Him in faith to deliver, protect, guide, and provide. Sadly, the human default is either flight or fight, but running away or blaming someone else stops us from facing reality and denies us the all-important grace of God. When we find ourselves under pressure, in one way or another, it is wise to resist the temptation to make a quick escape or hit out and instead: Stop! Pray! And look to the Lord to move His hand to help us. God knew the shallow attitude of His people and their false plea of injustice against Him, so He resolved to test their feigned trust in Him by providing only what they needed day by day. Manna appeared on the ground as a fresh white grain the size of a pearl. The people gathered it, ground it like grain, folded it, and made it into honey-tasting tortillas. This was the free gift of God's grace in abundance every day to satisfy their physical need but still they did not trust or obey God. When told there would be none on the Sabbath, they collected twice as much the day before. However, by the morning it was bad and full of maggots. We can only learn to follow by following. We can only learn obedience by obeying. To refuse both may leave us with nothing but maggots! Despite all the signs, wonders, and miracles of the Lord, the Israelites repeatedly failed the test miserably!

Jesus goes straight to the heart of the crowd's indignation at not telling them where they could find Him. He chastises the people for following Him only for physical and historical benefits, not because they were spiritually hungry. Many people use religion for self-centred motives to gain prestige, security, or power. But God does not ask for religion and Jesus does not teach self-centred motivation. God asks for our heart and Jesus teaches us how to give it. True believers follow the Lord simply because they know Jesus walks in the only way to live in righteousness and gain the food of eternal life. The crowd still does not get it! They respond

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by asking how they can perform the works of God, still in the mind-set of doing instead of being and self-dependency instead of faith. Many sincere seekers of God still ask what should be done to satisfy God. The religions of the world have attempted to answer it and failed because they too remain in a 'doing' mind-set! Satisfying God does not come from what we do, but from whom we believe. Jesus states in His reply: "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent." Belief in Jesus as the Son of God comes by faith not works and all spiritual development hinges on this affirmation. By faith, our spirit communes with the Holy Spirit to reveal Truth, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" ([Hebrews 11:1](#)). *Are we looking for physical and historical benefits instead of spiritual Truth? Do we follow self-serving desires believing they will save us? Is our mind-set stuck in the groove of doing to somehow earn our salvation?*

The only fruitful way to live is to follow the example of Jesus to find Truth, because without Truth we cannot discern the path to God. The people running after Jesus still did not get it! They now ask Jesus to prove by signs who He says He is, as if they have not seen enough already! They demand something they can see, touch, feel and taste, like the manna of their ancestors. Jesus again tries to explain the difference between physical, finite understanding and belief by spiritual faith. He repeats that it was God who provided for the physical needs of the Israelites in the wilderness, not by anything they had done or indeed deserved, but by spiritual providence. Jesus points out that the True bread is not grown and made on earth to be offered up but comes down from Heaven as a gift of life from God. Jesus now likens Himself to manna, repeating the phrase, "I Am the Bread of Life" several times over. We eat bread to satisfy physical hunger and sustain physical life. Only through a right relationship with Jesus can we satisfy spiritual hunger and sustain spiritual life. Christ is our daily bread who satisfies our spiritual need and sustains eternal life. Do not be deceived; this is not a one-off event. We need to eat and drink every day to remain physically healthy and it follows that we need to eat and drink of the 'Bread of Christ' and His 'Living Water' every day to remain spiritually healthy. Christ must be invited into our daily lives to Reveal Truth and impart spiritual life. *Are we seeking Jesus to find Truth or to justify our own desires? Do we live by faith or dependence on what we can see, touch, feel and taste? Is eating the manna of God's Word and drinking the teaching of Jesus part of our daily routine?*

We; the people of God who believe in Jesus as His Son, are to stand as beacons of hope, a sanctuary for those suffering under worldly oppression. The manna from heaven that God has so freely given and Jesus has sacrificially provided is now ours to offer to others. "Jesus said to them, "I am the Bread of Life. Whoever comes to Me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in Me will never be thirsty." *What 'bread' is the church offering and what 'water' are we giving people to drink?* If we are giving Jesus to the people they should be flocking to the church in awe, wonder, and praise. The secular world is not deaf or blind, they can recognise the difference between false smiles and the real thing. Only Truth will attract others as a flame attracts a moth, shadows have no appeal whatsoever. **Amen!**

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**Hymn/Song:** Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah *by William Williams (1717-91)*

HP 437 & SoF 148

Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah,  
Pilgrim through this barren land;

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I am weak, but Thou art mighty;  
Hold me with Thy powerful hand:  
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven,  
Feed me now and evermore,  
Feed me now and evermore.

Open Thou the crystal fountain,  
Whence the healing stream shall flow;  
Let the fiery, cloudy pillar  
Lead me all my journey through:  
Strong Deliverer, Strong Deliverer,  
Be Thou still my strength and shield,  
Be Thou still my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,  
Bid my anxious fears subside;  
Death of death, and hell's destruction,  
Land me safe on Canaan's side:  
Songs of praises, songs of praises,  
I will ever give to Thee,  
I will ever give to Thee.

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**Poem: I AM the Bread** ©Janice Morgan 2018

I AM the Bread, the Lord said,  
I AM what sustains your life.  
Your every breath from birth to death,  
Is given you by My Spirit.

I AM the Bread, the Lord said,  
Each morsel you eat gives strength.  
With every chew I give to you,  
An inheritance beyond belief.

I AM the Bread, the Lord said,  
To swallow Me is to live.  
So drink Me down, with blood to drown,  
The wounds of Satan's bite.

I AM the Bread, the Lord said,  
Just trust Me and follow My ways.  
Then you will see, you abide in Me  
And I in you always.

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### **Prayer:**

Father God, feed us with manna from heaven that we might be spiritually healthy; Jesus, our Saviour, open to us Your spring of living water that we might quench the thirst of our souls; Holy Spirit, open our hearts and minds to the Truth of God's Word and the sacrifice Jesus made for us. **Amen!**