

Jesus says, “I am the living bread come down from heaven,” (John 6.51). Jesus embodies God’s way of being in the world. Jesus acknowledges that faith is a day-by-day thing and says, “I will be with you day after day.” As we read these stories of faith that took place before Jesus, we still hear Jesus. In last week’s reading Moses encountered the burning bush. Then Moses goes back to Egypt and tells the pharaoh to, “Let God’s people go,” ten times and the ten plagues happen. After the last plague the Israelites flee Egypt, crossing the Red Sea and today’s reading takes place one month after having been freed from their 400 years of slavery.

When you tell the stories of the founding of a nation it is generally understood that you should embellish—like a fish story—the 10 inch fish becomes 15. If you were a nation, you would tell about how your first leader even in his youth could not tell a lie, even about something as small as chopping down a cherry tree. But the stories recorded in the Bible about the beginning of the nation of Israel are much less self-aggrandizing. In today’s story, the Israelites have been traveling for one month and have complained three times wanting to go back to slavery in Egypt. These stories don’t sugar coat the history, they tell the truth—as humans we can be quick to complain and God responds with love. God is the great giver—providing what we need and loving us when we mess up.

Having faith that God will be faithful, is often difficult. The stories about God’s people in the desert shows us two ways that having faith is hard. First, when we have nothing it is hard to have faith. Put yourself into the the place of the Israelites, imagine you are out in the desert and you’ve run out of food. Yes, God has brought you out of slavery but now you’re in the

wilderness and you’re are hungry. There could be a feeling of deep betrayal. Trust is hard when you have an empty belly. Faith is really hard when faith is all you have.

The second way faith is hard happens as this story continues... God gives food; the Manna comes in the morning. And then the next morning there is manna and the next morning manna and the next and the next. When God provides day after day, we can start to take it for granted. This is a little hard to understand but it is hard to have faith that God will be faithful when we have a lot. When manna is appearing everyday we can start to believe that the manna appears because of us. I’m smart enough and experienced enough to know where the manna will be, I’ve worked for it, I deserve manna. Faith becomes hard because we don’t feel like God is providing, we don’t feel like we need to depend on God. Martin Luther said, “The number one thing that keeps us from trusting God is money.”

According to the world’s standards almost all Americans are rich but we often don’t feel like it because we don’t have the nicest car, go on the right vacations or wear the latest clothes. About 95% of the world population has no car so they look at a person driving, even an old jalopy and say, “rich.” The Israelites start getting manna every morning, they have tents the keep out the cold at night and before long they are melting down their gold to make a golden calf their god. It is harder to have faith that God will be faithful when we have money. So what do we do?Give! Scientific research shows when we are generous we have we are happier. And the Bible says generosity is part of the Christian life. You believing God will be faithful and you being generous are connected.

When Bible talks about us giving, it suggests a range between 10-25%. We always hear about tithing or giving 10% as the Biblical rule but, especially in the Old Testament, there were other offerings that were part of the faithful life and those added up to an additional 10-15%. As Americans we pay taxes and as I figure at least 60% of our taxes go to things you could easily consider “public good” type things: food, housing, healthcare and more. We give with our taxes but giving 10% of our income away to things we believe make the world a better place for all people is this other thing traditionally called tithing.

Why give? I’ve asked a lot of people that question and I’ve heard different answers:

- 1) giving makes me feel good. Giving gives me hope the world will be a better place and I have joy knowing I am part of that getting better
- 2) giving frees me from my need to control. Giving money away opens my hands, gives me a sense of abundance and hope
- 3) giving is my form of positive protest. Giving is me telling all the forces that want take my money, “No!” It is me saying, “there is more than enough.” Giving is my way of showing that love wins.

Faith and money are connected and the connection is something to examine as individuals, families, and church. Giving empowers our faith and gives joy to our lives.

In the gospel of John (6.51) Jesus says, “I am the living bread come down from heaven.” Jesus embodies God’s way of being in the world. A way that rains down enough and even abundance on us. Jesus acknowledges that faith is a day-by-day thing and Jesus says, “I will be with you day after day.”