

Joyfully Feasting on the Daily Bread of Life
based on Exodus 15:22-16:7, David Jahnke, 2/7/16

Right after the Israelites were delivered from slavery, they encountered scarcity in the wilderness. First they ran out of water and when they finally met up with some, it was not clean. The people cried out to Moses who cried to the Lord who showed Moses what to do to make the water clean which Moses did. They had a drink and continued on their way to an oasis in the desert called Elim. There they camped, enjoying beautiful palm trees and twelve springs of water.

God then told them they would not suffer from disease as long as they listened for his voice and followed his Way through the wilderness. Shortly after moving on, however, they run out of food. They complained again and the Lord provided manna from heaven.

I will start with 1. physical hunger, 2. move to spiritual hunger and end with 3. the relationship between vocations and vacations— that is filling others and emptying ourselves. These correspond to a three-step model for resolving scarcity from today's passage: 1. desperately crying out to the Lord and our leaders for help. 2. listening for and hearing God's voice, and 3. doing what He tells us to do.

Hunger remains a big issue in our own nation, which is astonishing, considering we are the richest nation in the world. So just the Israelites cried out to their leader Moses to do something, we should demand that our leaders do more rather than less to help the hungry and the sick.

A big question is whether they are like Moses in listening for the voice of God; whether they pay attention to the cries of the hungry and thirsty; whether they pray for guidance and heed the voice of compassion in their conscience which is the voice of God.

At this time in the campaign season, we know well how some of them put on quite a show when it comes to religion. And I am sure that most of them are sincere. But they better remember what Jesus' brother James had to say about what makes for a true religion— that is caring for orphans and widows in their distress which of course applies to the sick and the hungry in their distress as well.

Well when Moses cried out to God, God showed him what to do and he wants to show all leaders, including us, what we all can do to combat the demonic problem of hunger in the richest nation in the world.

And the answer for us is so much simpler than it was for Moses and the Israelites who depended on miracles to be fed and have clean water. All we have to do is share out of the abundance with which God has blessed us!

And I am so grateful for all of the ways that this church witnesses in this regard. The Crop Walk, Heifer and One Great Hour of Sharing raise \$6-8,000 in this regard. Our Thrift Shop donated \$16,500 last year! Our Food Bank and meal ministries provide hundreds if not a thousand or more meals every month. Leaders here are listening for God and then acting. And if you have not had a chance to participate in these Jubilee ministries of sharing mercy and joy, please let me know of your interest. Because God does expect us to act upon his Word! Your salvation does not depend on it. But someone else's might!

Now onto spiritual hunger which is another plague in modern society, though less astonishing. But spiritual hunger as well can be overcome by simply using the same threefold method already mentioned: 1. crying out to God in prayer, 2. listening for and receiving God's Word through study and 3. doing what the Word says.

Now you may be thinking to yourself, "Well David, I do not really feel any sort of spiritual hunger. I think I am doing all right."

Well you might very well be. But as I was thinking about this, a memory came back to me. I was in college and a girl told me about how she had been feeling so much better after starting to be more careful about her diet. And someone else mentioning how he feels so much better after he exercises. And I did not buy any of it because I thought that I was feeling just fine. But in actuality, I was rather empty and often miserable and just did not know how much I was missing in life.

And the transformation began for me by getting physically healthy as I quit drinking, started exercising and eating well. My life opened up and blossomed as I started to see the beauty and richness of this incredible world while running and travelling. But over time, this was insufficient for true joy and I had to open myself up again and start travelling in the invisible world of the Spirit.

Now I do not mean to imply that you are miserable and simply do not know it. I just want to point out how there is fullness and a depth of joy out there and in here which can begin with getting things right physically. But a deeper joy demands going deeper—to the hidden underlying things of the Spirit. And we journey to and in that world through prayer, study and subsequent obedience to the invisible Love which connects and fills and transcends all things.

That Love is both our vocation and our vacation. It is our call to work and our call to rest; our call to fill others and this world full of love and empty ourselves of the causes of dis-ease and joylessness.

This idea came to me through the Israelites' journey to Elim. God had told them that by listening to Him, they would be healed. And right after this, they end up in a kind paradise in the desert. And this kind of wonderful paradise is our end. But God wants that end to fill our middle as well.

Do you know the feeling of hungering for a vacation? That point where after a few months of hard work, things just do not seem as satisfying as they should? And vacation is calling?

Well it is...and we should all listen to that voice and travel and rest and relax. Please take whatever vacation time you are offered at your workplace.

But the physical journey-- getting away from it all points, again, to deeper spiritual truths. First, we must vacate or empty ourselves of our possessions-- giving to those in need. We are freed time and anxiety-wise because we have less to be concerned with. And our conscience is freed because this is what God is calling us to. And because he is calling us to it, he fills more fully with his blessings when we pour them out upon others.

Second, as we travel through the invisible realm of the Spirit...we empty ourselves of all the profane things that weigh us down and keep us from joy. We need to confess and be forgiven and gradually transformed. When we let go of the sin and shame and guilt that keep us from joy, we open ourselves and receive the heavenly things that bring us joy. When we do these things, the joy and peace that we feel during vacations becomes a part of our daily lives.

So to sum up: join the joyful journey of God by doing the following on a regular basis: 1. Relate to God and seek his Spirit and his way, crying out regularly until he comes to you or comes back to you. 2. Second, you are more likely to sense him as you empty yourself of materials and profane things that weigh you down. Give them to God and His children. And 3. third, follow the Way of Love which is God's voice...and joyfully and peacefully call others and especially powerful leaders to do the same.

It has worked for me and billions who have come before us...most of whom suffered from a physical scarcity that we do not know...and yet still they knew the joy of the Lord. You can find it too through the tried and true disciplines that connect us to God...through the one who can do far more abundantly in you than all you can ask or imagine and to whom belongs all the power and the glory in the church and Christ Jesus. And God's people say...

Invitation to the table-- "Jesus said, 'Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. Anyone who hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with them and they with me.'" Jesus calls all who trust in Love and mercy to open the door of their hearts and let him come in and feed us with his gracious presence.

