

Proper 20 Year A
The Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC
The Rev. Catherine L. Tatem
September 20, 2020

Exodus 16:2-5 Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45 Philippians 1:21-30
Matthew 20:1-6

What we remember

There is nothing like a family vacation. We have seen images of them on television: the kids yell, “yay, we’re at Disney World!” or we see a cruise ship in a brilliant blue ocean. There are water slides and ice cream cones; everyone is smiling and happy.... These images have nothing to do with a real family vacation.

A Tatem family vacation was all about camping. In tents. One vacation in Maine included such a deluge of rain that my parents and I slept in the car. My brothers were being drenched in a pup tent outside. There was so much driving rain that a lobster buoy washed ashore. Somewhere along the way we gathered a few starfish dried them on the roof of the car. Imagine how the car smelled when we brought them inside!

Family vacation stories continue, with my brothers “claiming” the window seats well in advance of the trip, a brother and a dog who got carsick, the trip to a serpentarium in Florida. Let’s review: rain, fighting over window seats, dead sea creatures, car sickness, and intentionally visiting snakes – that’s a family vacation.

The Israelites certainly were not on vacation. God saved them from a life of slavery and brutal labor, and then they underwent a forty-year journey through the desert. The Promised Land was always somewhere ahead. I am sure that there were dead animals, motion sick members, human and otherwise, and a whole lot of sights along the way that the people would rather not see. And the snakes are documented in the book of Numbers. It probably rained in the desert just when they needed to pitch their tents and set up camp. Perhaps a sandstorm followed the rain. Still, the “whole congregation of Israelites” wished that they had encountered death and full bellies in Egypt rather than hunger and life in the desert with Moses.

11The Lord spoke to Moses and said, 12“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.’”

When life is difficult, we cannot see what the times ahead of us will bring, and we are starving (for God) in every moment, God hears our prayers. God hears us and God provides for us, day by day. We know the prayer: “Our Father Give us this day our daily bread.” The hardest time to remember God’s generous provisions is when we, too, find ourselves in the desert, in a desert time such as 2020 has become.

We are starving, still. We would rather be back in January than in the present time and place. God hears our prayers. The totality of how God will redeem this year has not yet been revealed. It has been and still is a time for us to engage in God's story, our story, in new ways. Have you taken that time with God, to see manna, spiritual food, sprinkled at your feet? This is a great moment to spend some time with God, in silence, in prayer and in action.

I have found a journal and bible studies that combine God's word with blank pages for writing and decorated pages for coloring. I am glad to show you, to share, how to pray in color. We can do that anywhere and in any time. In that sort of time with God, the Holy Spirit always shows up. God has something to tell us, collectively and individually. God is right now feeding us, watching over us, participating in word and sacrament, pouring abundance upon us, giving us our daily bread. The journey is strange, but we are making our way through it.

As for the family vacations? What we share is a choice. We made it through every single camping trip. What we choose to remember and to share is a decision. We can make life sound really bad. Telling you about dead sea creatures is a choice. Complaining to Moses was a choice. I can also tell you about sitting in the front seat with my parents, reading maps and seeing a whole new world out the window. I can tell you about singing and roadside picnics and the fascinating experience of seeing huge crocodiles in open air pits. I can share with you how we are fed in our wanderings. We experienced many delights on each trip: museums, beautiful campgrounds and parks, Colonial Williamsburg, the World's Fair in Montreal, explorations throughout New York State and up and down the East Coast. The other stuff gives us hilarious stories to share with the next generation, who think we must have been camping with the dinosaurs. There is nothing like a family vacation. There is nothing like this time, either, and it is the time in which we live. What will we choose to remember? What stories will we tell?

Our bishop Andrew Waldo writes:

After five months of pandemic restrictions, we have all come to know things we didn't know we needed to know, and to practice new habits to protect our health and well-being. We have begun to understand more fully how best to worship, learn, serve and connect when we can't be physically together. What has been a fluid situation continues to be fluid. We are alternately tempted to be fearful or complacent, and have thereby stuttered our way into new and regularizing community rhythms. And, it is worth remaining mindful that this unique moment in world history has much to teach us about faith, hope, and love. Love, in Whom we abide, and the greatest of these three, will indeed teach us more than we can ask or imagine.

What will we remember about Love? Amen.