



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

A Devotion During This Time of the Coronavirus Pandemic Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost, September 20, 2020

It's Complicated

by Garland F. Pierce

Exodus 16:2-15

16:2 The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.

16:3 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."

16:4 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.

16:5 On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days."

16:6 So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "In the evening you shall know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt,

16:7 and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your complaining against the LORD. For what are we, that you complain against us?"

16:8 And Moses said, "When the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the LORD has heard the complaining that you utter against him--what are we? Your complaining is not against us but against the LORD."

16:9 Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, 'Draw near to the LORD, for he has heard your complaining.'"

16:10 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.

16:11 The LORD spoke to Moses and said,

16:12 "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.'"

16:13 In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp.

16:14 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.

16:15 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.

If you are familiar with social media and have viewed the profiles of individuals, you may have run across the category of "relationship status" and read "single", "in relationship with...", or that vague description, "It's complicated."

One might think that if a people desires freedom, then the journey toward it ought to be straightforward. The goal is clear. They know what they have left—bondage and oppression. They know where they are going or where they want to go, even if they do not quite know how to get there—freedom, the Promised Land. However, the truth is the journey toward freedom can be complicated. Life is rarely ever simply black and white; there are gray areas. There are multiple paths, twists and turns, dead-ends and traps. Even in oppressive situations and relationships, sometimes there is comfort in the known that at times looks and feels more appealing than the huge fear of the unknown, even if the unknown ultimately contains the promise of freedom. While on the journey, one never knows just what might come along and trigger us to look back over our shoulders, longing for the past. It's complicated. The journey to freedom might be what we wanted. Exodus might be what we need; but, the journey can be hard. We may not be able to immediately see any provisions. What will be the next meal? Then we remember the fleshpots from which we ate even in the midst of our bondage. We get nostalgic. We get restless. And we begin to complain, "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."

It's complicated! When is complaint the proper and necessary response? What must accompany complaint? To whom must complaints be directed—Moses? Aaron? God? In many cases, policies or the lack thereof seem to be making the casualties and fatalities of this pandemic worse rather than better. To whom should we complain? In what shape should our complaints take—letters to our elected officials, protest in the street, a vote casted at the ballot box, a fervent prayer of petition? When is complaint a faithful response? When is complaint a sign of faithlessness and ingratitude?

I cannot quite discern how God hears and understands the complaints of the Israelites; but, what I do know is that God does hear and answer their complaint, saying to Moses, "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.'"

And God was faithful to God's word, declaring, reaffirming, and proving that God would keep God's end of the covenant relationship to be their provider, their protector, their guide, and their God. We are living in complicated times. We are complicated people. The problems before us seem complicated and not easily solved with simple solutions. The needed vaccine nor all the needed answers will not likely come neatly or conveniently by November 3rd as some would have us believe. But God understands. God knows. God cares. God promises to be our provider, our protector, and our guide on this journey toward freedom and salvation. The LORD promises to be our God.

TALK: Take a moment to be silent, reflect, and share (write down)—During this pandemic, have you complaint? What has been your complaint? Was it a faithful response or a sign of a lack of faith or gratitude?

PRAY:

Almighty God, you have saved your people throughout the ages and protected them in ways which can never be fully understood. Give us the courage to face issues of good and evil within our world with the strength and courage only You can give, and so contribute to Your work for love, justice, and peace in the world. Stir within us faith and gratitude. Guide us on our journey toward freedom and a closer relationship with you. Great Jehovah, feed us until we want no more. We pray in the name of the Bread of Heaven, Jesus. AMEN

Adapted from: <http://www.netdevotions.org/BExodus%2015,1-12.pdf>

ACT:

1. Based on your reflections from the TALK section, start to think through and make a plan as to how you will help those who shall come behind us understand what it was like to live through these tumultuous times of 2020. *Write down/record the complaints and your prayers!* For those US citizens, here are some practical actions to take: Participate in the current democratic processes (voter registration, voting, completing the 2020 census (**CENSUS DEADLINE: WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 2020**) and encouraging others to do so—See: <http://www.amev-alert.org> and <https://2020census.gov>.) For everyone, practice social distancing as much as possible, wash your hands often, and wear face covering to help prevent the spread of COVID-19—See: <http://www.amehealth.org>.

2. See also the activity that accompanies this devotion.

3. Revisit the Psalm 23 Challenge first issued as part of the March 22, 2020 set of resources.

Song:

Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah
AMEC Hymnal, #53

1. Guide me, O Thou great Je-ho-vah,
Pil-grim through this bar-ren land;
I am weak, but Thou art might-y,

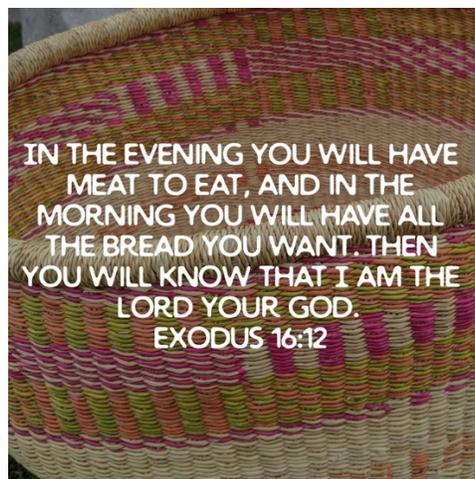
Hold me with Thy power-ful hand;
Bread of heav-en, Feed me till I want no more;
Bread of heav-en, Feed me till I want no more.

2. O-pen now the crys-tal foun-tain,
Whence the heal-ing wa-ters flow;
Let the fire and cloud-y pil-lar
Lead me all my jour-ney through;
Strong De-liv-erer, Be Thou still my strength and shield;
Strong De-liv-erer, Be Thou still my strength and shield.
3. When I tread the verge of Jor-dan,
Bid my anx-ious fears sub-side;
Bear me through the swell-ing cur-rent,
Land me safe on Ca-naan's side;
Songs of prais-es I will ev-er give to Thee;
Songs of prais-es I will ev-er give to Thee. A-men.

Alternative Song: *I Won't Complain* by Rev. Paul Jones: <https://youtu.be/ufyfKBL2KQ0>

Physical space—You may wish to create a dedicated space for your time of devotion. You may choose to place a candle, bible, and special symbols or material/fabric to help you focus and center during this time of reflection and prayer.

If you use this meditation and exercise in a time of family or group devotion, share in the leadership; allow different persons to read or lead different parts of this meditation.



The Christian Education Department will continue to develop resources that can be used as times of personal and collective devotion and study during this pandemic to help us all sustain and strengthen our faith and resolve.