

Faith Mennonite Church  
October 8, 2017  
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Formation: God Provides Manna  
Exodus 16:1-18

Last Sunday Ry began his sermon by talking about Beyoncé's song "Freedom." I am of another generation and don't usually have Beyoncé on my playlist. (Truth be told, I don't even have a playlist! If I'm in the car I'm probably listening to NPR, a book, or a podcast--or perhaps classical music. If I'm doing any kind of thought-work, I prefer silence.) But I do know that Beyoncé also has a song titled "Formation." I'm not going to try to relate her lyrics to our scripture text today, but I think the undercurrent of our text is just that: *formation*.

What comes after freedom? How do we live in and into freedom? How do people who have had no freedoms learn to embrace and live fully in freedom? History, both biblical and secular, shows us that the transition from no freedom to full freedom is often fraught and without some form of formation it can often end in new oppressions and new violence.

There are a number of ways to think about the 40-year experience of the Israelites in the wilderness after their liberation march from Egypt. One of those is certainly *formation*: a time of testing, of trusting, of developing a new identity as a free people. Our story this morning is at the beginning of the wilderness experience. Basic problem number one: what do we do for food? Freedom's great, but we need food! And when there's a food problem, complaining won't be very far behind! The complaining in this case seems pretty valid: food is a basic need and there isn't any to be seen or had! Note that God does not seem upset by the complaining; God hears the complaint and begins responding almost immediately. Moses, however, has a more difficult time with the complaining. He takes it personally and feels like the scapegoat. Obviously, this is problem way beyond his ability to respond.

I'd like us to take a moment for reflection. If you haven't already done so, feel free to jot down a response to the first question in the bulletin: What complaining have you heard this week? What have you complained about? (Responses: Lack of response to Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico; indifference to gun deaths in our country; drivers; "we eat the same thing every night," the rain.) What is the positive effect of complaining? (It calls attention to a need; it calls for action.) What is the negative effect of complaining? (If we only complain, we spin our wheels and nothing changes.)

We could talk a lot more about complaining, but our text this morning moves quickly from complaining to provision. This provision is "provision with a purpose," that formation piece. God supplies food—evening meat and morning bread—on a daily basis and asks that each household to gather just enough for the day and for the number of people in their household. No hoarding; no stock-piling. There are two basic lessons here: 1) God provides for our *basic* needs; 2) We can trust that God *does* provide.

Let's take another pause and this time, think about a time when God supplied a *basic* need in your life, perhaps in an unexpected way. Now, please turn to someone close by and you'll each have one minute to briefly share how your need was met. I hope that what you've heard and shared will be a form of nourishment to all of us today!

We also have a special opportunity this morning to have a representative from Mennonite Central Committee, Jordan Penner, with us today. Jordan served with MCC in Guatemala and Bolivia and now works for the MCC-Central States office, from his home in Denver, CO. He came to town for last night's fund-raising event. We've invited Jordan to share several "manna" stories with us, ways that God is

working through Mennonite Central Committee and its partner churches and organizations to provide for the basic needs of people. Welcome, Jordan.

I would like to offer a challenge for each of us in the coming week: Whether you live alone or with others, I hope that each day you will take a moment, perhaps during a meal, to think about/discuss a complaint and what you would hope/dream for how that situation might change *and* notice and give thanks for the way your basic needs are met.

As we conclude this time, would you please turn to the scripture page in your bulletin, and join in reading the final two verses (17-18) of the passage: The Israelites did so, some gathering more, some less. But when they measured it with an Omer, those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed.