

Holy Quail!

Exodus 16:1-36, Numbers 11:4-35

Anyone here have cravings? Coffee? Chocolate? Ice Cream? Truffles?

Did you ever have that feeling when you just must have something decadent? Your mouth wants to be naughty! Your eye catches that chocolate cake across the room! You watch it, you try not to, but you do. You can't help yourself. And then, after all the restraint you can muster, you go for it. You eat the biggest piece you can. Later, you clutch your stomach all night long in pain. Too much chocolate!!!

As a people, our ability to do things in moderation is a bit stunted at times.

Likewise, our ability to wait. When we want something, we usually want it NOW.

Hence the development of something called "fast food!" Food on the run. Food super-fast and super easy so we can gobble it all down in large quantities quickly and briskly.... while we're on the run.

Think about it this way. Maybe you're out doing errands. You skipped breakfast. But before you know it, it's already midafternoon.... way past lunch time, and you're REALLY hungry. You know you're going to have a healthy, great meal at a restaurant that evening at 6, but right now it's 2, and 6:00 PM feels like a long time – TOO long to wait. And that apple you brought along in your pocket just isn't going to do!

So, you stop at McDonalds, or some other fast-food joint, and gobble down a couple of cheeseburgers and a pack of fries. And then by the time you get to dinner.... you're not really hungry anymore. And the next day, you're craving cheeseburgers again! It's weird how that happens, right? Well, it's not weird. It's called addiction!

The Israelites in our scripture today had something like "fast food addiction" too!

They had left Elim, apparently a town with some decent food and a place to bathe and satisfy the decencies of life. But they still had a long road ahead until the promised land. And they had to hop to it.

They knew when they reached that land of promise, they'd have great food, fertile land for crops, wine, fruits and vegetables, sheep galore. Fish too. But that seemed like a Long time away. And before you know it, they hadn't gone very far on their journey, when they started to moan about how hungry they were becoming.

They had reached the land of Zin, which means land of thorns, so you can tell by the name that it wasn't a very fertile or pleasant place. Pretty much a desert. It was hot. They were tired. And they were starting to reminisce about their lives back in Egypt –where they at least had great food to eat, they thought.

So, God satisfied their bodies and hearts with a gift of something called Manna! Now in the Exodus story today, it tells us that God sent both Manna and Quail. But in the same story in Numbers, we learn that the Manna came first, and then later the Quail.

The real story apparently goes.... that people got quickly tired of manna, manna, manna. It was a kind of seedy, flaky substance that they could roll out, and bake. So, they had manna cakes for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, it got them through. They must have been nutritious kind of like getting along on "trail mix" or "nutrition bars." Food for the journey!

It wasn't haute cuisine, but it would get them through until they reached that land of promise, where a great feast and fertility awaited.

But that wasn't good enough. They wanted MEAT, they said. Enough of this trail bar stuff, they said! No more dehydrated SPAM. Enough with the seeds and the chewy manna bars. We want MEAT!

Never mind that God was looking after them day by day, making sure they were nourished for their journey. They wanted MORE, BETTER, BEST! They wanted MEAT!

So, God, in God's kind of wisdom, said...okay then. I'll give you meat! And I'll tell you what.... your unquenchable, insatiable, "gimme now" kind of appetite is going to lead you into a not so good place. Here you go! Have some Quail. In fact, have ALL the quail you can eat! Days and weeks of quail! Let's see what happens when you stuff yourselves, cause I know that's what you'll do!

And with their insatiable appetites for more, better, best....the Israelites, looked up and raced for the shores. For God sent the wind of God's Spirit.... and swept quail in from the sea in torrents!

There were quail everywhere! They came in and fell to the ground.

And the Israelites shouted with glee. They practically tripped over each other, racing for that quail. And the people ate and ate until they couldn't eat anymore.

For weeks they gathered up the quail from the shore and cooked, and ate.

But there was something they forgot in their insatiable appetites.... something God had mentioned when God sent the manna. Only eat what is sent that day.... Quail in the evening, manna in the morning. After that....it will no longer be good.

God gives us everything we need. Sometimes it's not exactly what we'd like. Sometimes, it may take longer to get to the good part of our lives, when things work out like we want them to, and we reach that destination place, where things feel right and good in our lives. Most of life for many of us is not so much spending time in a destination as it is traveling on the journey. And in our vast journey of life, there can be trials, and hardships, and sometimes, a hunger for something more.

And God promises us that "more" –that amazing feast in God's heavenly kingdom. All we have to do is trust God in the journey and have faith that God will provide for our bodies and our souls.

Jesus tells us, that He is the Bread of Life –the bread that will never run out, that will always satisfy, that will sustain, and that will guide us through our journey until the Day when we take our place at the Holy Table in the Kingdom of Heaven, where Christ has saved a place for us.

We don't really need more than that, do we? What does the prayer say that Jesus taught us? "Give us this day, our "daily" bread. And Lord, "forgive us our debts," because we make a mess of things sometimes with our appetites for more, better, best. The truth is.... there is nothing more beautiful than God's kingdom, and nothing better than making the journey with Christ.

The destination will be beautiful. But you know what? It's not all about the destination. Life is mostly about the journey –how we live, how we love, how we trust and obey.