

There is lots of complaining in our culture today! Lots of negative thinking; things are getting worse, like politics or the economy; everything's falling apart. Things we used to rely on aren't there any more. We can always find SOMETHING to complain about. Sometimes such complaints are legitimate, when real problems come; things in your life are falling apart. These can be stressful, challenging times in people's lives. But when we're inclined to complain, or see the negative side of a situation, we can reframe it and look at it through the eyes of faith: where is there a blessing? An opportunity? How is God working in whatever is going on in our lives? Where is there evidence of the grace and glory of God?

Looking at Exodus, we see now that the Israelites were in the wilderness, and they began to look back on Egypt through newly acquired rose-colored memories. Remember, God has just set them free from slavery and captivity in Egypt, has just parted the sea, and then washed away the Egyptian soldiers, and now were setting them on a course toward the Promise Land. But, this freedom wasn't so easy. There was bitter water, and barren land. Food was scarce, and there was much uncertainty about the present and future. They were hungry and tired and grouchy. They were complaining and complaining and complaining. Instead of trusting in God – remembering what GOD has done for them, they are reminiscing about their time in Egypt. At least in Egypt they had food to eat!! Yeah sure, we endured hard labor under the ruthless rule of the guards, but at least we had food at the end of the day! Out here, there's nothing!! This was God's grand plan – to bring us out here into the wilderness so we'd starve to death??

As bad and oppressive as it was in captivity, the certainty of their life in Egypt seemed easier than whatever awaited them in the wilderness. Their memories of the past became distorted by their current reality. So they complained and questioned God out of their fear and anxiety. The wilderness can be a barren place. They had no idea what to expect. They couldn't see beyond their immediate crisis to what was possible with God.

And God understood this – the entire journey through the wilderness would be a journey of trust and hope in God. So even though they were ungrateful for what God had done; Even though they forgot how bad it was in Egypt, and longed to return in time for dinner; even though all they could do was grumble and complain, God took care of them. To assure them that God was still with them, that God would be faithful in providing for their needs, that they could trust and rely on God, or as God says, “that they who know that I am the Lord their God,” God fed them. God would feed them with the ultimate comfort food – BREAD. They just didn't know it was bread!

It says that after having quail for dinner, they woke up the next morning to find a layer of dew around the camp. When the dew lifted, it says, “There on the surface of the wilderness was a fine, flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground.” We often refer to it as manna. But the Hebrew word is actually “Min Hu” which means “What is it?” This flaky stuff getting all over their feet – they pick it up and examine it -- doesn't look much like bread to them! What were they to do with it?

It's like when you go to someone's home for dinner, and they serve up something

that looks completely foreign to you, and not too appetizing, and while you’re saying something gracious like, “That looks delicious,” you’re thinking, “What is it??”

So we can relate to their question, “What is it?” And while they are asking this question to one another, Moses tells them, “It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat!”

OHHHHH! Now they see it! What seemed to be some weird flaky substance turned out to be the very Bread of Heaven! What seemed to be so insignificant turned out to be evidence of the glory and providence of God!

In a time of uncertainty, when they didn’t even know how they would find food to eat, let alone begin a new life, God cared for them. God blessed them. And as their basic needs were met, they developed a new awareness of God presence among them. In the verses that follow, we read that the “what is it?” inspired them to worship the Lord their God.

And in our times of uncertainty, when life is hard, and we feel like we’re in a barren place, instead of focusing on what we lack, or what is lost, we reframe our point of view, and through the lens of faith, we look for how God is at work. It may come in ways that at first are confusing or unsettling, but as we trust God, we develop a new awareness and gratitude to God. We begin to see the grace and glory of God!

FOR EXAMPLE: A man who had a prominent position in his company was downsized. This put unexpected financial stress on the family, and he had loved his work, so something important was lost.

However, it also allowed him the opportunity to become a stay at home dad, and giving his child and family the attention he could not have otherwise done. So what is it? An unfair, demoralizing experience, or an unexpected blessing and opportunity? Could it even be evidence of the glory and providence of God?

BULLYING

Bullying is a prominent issue in schools these days. It's always gone on, but facebook and texting can make it so much more destructive. A couple of girls were being bullied by their peers -- posting terrible things on facebook pages; calling them names at school, spreading rumors about them -- seemingly for no reason. They ignored and endured it for awhile, and then realized that the other girls weren't going to let up. So, instead of become victims of this treatment, the girls talked to their pastor and created a support group for other girls who were having similar problems.

They recruited older young women -- high school and college age to give advice of how to handle certain situations, helped build self-esteem, and how to stand up for others being bullied all from the perspective of Christian faith.

What is it? A painful and abusive reality, or an opportunity to empower themselves and others? What is it? Could it be evidence of the glory and providence of God?

Those are just a couple of examples. All of us face our own wildernesses -- times of uncertainty, fear, chaos, anxiety. When there is much that is out of our control. When our inclination is to complain! And it's true that sometimes we just need to vent! But as

people of faith, we can find within those barren places a blessing; in insignificant things a gift from God; in the most unlikely ways the glory and providence of God.

What is it? When it comes from God, it is the very bread of heaven!