

This title is something my daughters would say when catching me whining about something. “Do you want a little whine with that cheese?” The Israelites in today’s text are whiners. They’ve been led out of slavery on freedom’s road; they’ve danced and sung praises to God; and now they’re hungry. What? No food? I’m sure it didn’t feel so silly to them as it seems to us when we read it. And I’m sure our own whining doesn’t seem silly either when we find ourselves caught up in the pettiness of which we are all capable.

One thing should be noted and that is that this whining of the Israelites is different than the time honored tradition of Jewish lament or complaint. Job, the Psalms, and countless other Hebrew texts don’t mince the words of the suffering of people pleading with God to hear them, redeem and rescue them from oppression and suffering.

These are people who believed God to be trust worthy; people who had a long standing relationship with God; people who trusted that God could and would act on their behalf but in the meantime they were suffering and appealing to God to make justice happen NOW! These BIG complaints were to be honored in the God-human relationship. They were the kind of complaints and demands that people make on each other when they’ve known and loved each other for a long time and when they count on one another to come through for them. They are laments that touch the core essence of the relationship between God and creation.

But whining is different. This whining reveals a lack of trust and an inordinate concern with ones momentary comfort. One commentary calls this section of Exodus “Israel’s Adolescence.” Here they show self-focus. It’s all about me-myself-and I. It’s the rebellion of adolescents who think they are independent and don’t need to change to be part of community.

The wilderness represents a growing up time for Israel. Here their adolescent relationship with God eventually after 40 years becomes a mature one. In response to their whining that they wish they were back in Egypt where there was food, God gives them food--manna and quail. But they are to gather just what they need for a given day with the exception of two days worth to cover the Sabbath. The temptation is great to make sure there’s going to be enough by storing some away, but it is no good, it rots. Israel is to learn the economy of not hoarding. They must be trained to depend upon God’s promise that tomorrow more manna will fall. This dependency is actually another form of freedom from slavery because it means Israel is free from the worry of survival and free to be in this moment and in this special covenantal relationship with God.

In summary, whining is self-focused on ones needs; while lament draws from the depth of authentic relationship employing God to come quickly to bring justice and ease pain. We might say it’s the difference between praying for a parking space and praying for world peace.

A friend sent me an email this week called:

***WHAT HAPPENS IN HEAVEN...***

*I dreamed that I went to Heaven and an angel was showing me around. We walked side-by-side inside a large workroom filled with angels. My angel guide stopped in front of the first section and said, 'This is the Receiving Section. Here, all petitions to God said in prayer are received.'*

*I looked around in this area, and it was terribly busy with so many angels sorting out petitions written on voluminous paper sheets and scraps from people all over the world. Then we moved on down a long corridor until we reached the second section.*

*The angel then said to me, 'This is the Packaging and Delivery Section. Here, the graces and blessings the people asked for are processed and delivered to the living persons who asked for them. I noticed again how busy it was there. There were many angels working hard at that station, since so many blessings had been requested and were being packaged for delivery to Earth.*

*Finally at the farthest end of the long corridor we stopped at the door of a very small station. To my great surprise, only one angel was seated there, idly doing nothing. 'This is the Acknowledgment Section,' my angel friend quietly admitted to me. He seemed embarrassed 'How is it that there is no work going on here?' I asked. 'So sad,' the angel sighed. 'After people receive the blessings that they asked for, very few send back acknowledgments .'*

*'How does one acknowledge God's blessings?' I asked. 'Simple,' the angel answered. Just say, 'Thank you, God.' 'What blessings should they acknowledge?' I asked.*

*'If you have food in the refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof overhead and a place to sleep you are richer than 75% of this world. If you have money in the bank, in your wallet, and spare change in a dish, you are among the top 8% of the world's wealthy .'*

*'And if you get this on your own computer, you are part of the 1% in the world who has that opportunity.'*

*'If you woke up this morning with more health than illness ... you are more blessed than the many who will not even survive this day .'*

*'If you have never experienced the fear in battle, the loneliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture, or the pangs of starvation ... you are ahead of 700 million people in the world.'*

*'If you can attend a church without the fear of harassment, arrest, torture or death you are envied by, and more blessed than, three billion people in the world .'*

*'If you can hold your head up and smile, you are not the norm, you're unique to all those in doubt and despair.'*

*If you can read this message, you just received a double blessing in that someone was thinking of you and you are more blessed than over two billion people in the world who cannot read at all. Have a good day, count your blessings, and if you want, pass this along to remind everyone else how blessed we all are.*

I didn't pass this email on but I offer it now for our consideration.

The "Inscription of Hope" which the choir sang this morning is composed of words on a cellar wall where Jews were hiding in war torn Germany. It expresses the deep knowing and trust born from the experience of being in relationship with that essence of the universe we call God. It is hope that despite all that would suggest otherwise, hope that knows the character of the One to whom he or she is committed.

It goes beyond the question of "Who is this it? that we call God" and it honors what is known as an "I-Thou" relationship. It is a recognition of the creative love that is and cannot be denied. We know it best in relationships with those nearest and dearest to us. Today's anthem proclaims a presence that cannot be objectified or quantitatively measured but it also cannot be denied. It is a presence we know as love. And so it is that from this "I-Thou" relationship we draw the courage to risk life lived abundantly to live and give from generosity rather than hoarding knowing that there is a love, both creative and responsive, to whom we draw our daily bread both for the body and the soul. And to this One we give our thanks and praise. AMEN