

## Exodus 16

This lesson covers the following portions of Exodus: 15:22-27, 16 and 17:1-7. We are looking at these passages together because they form a cohesive story within the text. These passages contain five teachable moments intended to help a group of freed slaves, imbued with Egyptian values and world view, become a new kind of people, with new values and a new world view, meaning the values and world view of YHWH.

Teachable moment one is the need for water (15:22-27). This moment begins when the people complain (to Moses) of the water being undrinkable. God hears (just like God heard their cries in slavery). God responds by making the water pure and by leading them to an oasis that has a spring for each family (12) and a palm tree for each of the children (70). This leads to the first teaching, that if the people will listen to YHWH, do what is right and keep God's commandments, then God will protect them from disease. This teachable moment begins to shape the people into a community that is organized around a relationship with a God who cares and not with a Pharaoh who does not.

Teachable moment two is the need for food (16:1-21). This moment begins when the people complain (to Moses and Aaron) of a lack of food. Once again God hears their cries. God responds by providing manna (the word for manna is derived from the question "what is it") and quail. The teachable moment here is not simply about trusting in God but about a new economy. The Egyptian economy was based on scarcity for the many and an abundance for the few, on hoarding (remember the slaves had been building storehouses for grain) and on a cyclical/seasonal view of production. God replaces these views with equity (all receive what they need), sufficiency (any attempt to store the manna results in loss) and daily provision (rather than seasonal harvesting). These lessons are a basic introduction to the economy which will be codified in the Torah.

Teachable moment three is the need for rest. (16:22-30) This moment does not begin with complaints but is a continuation of God's response to the complaint about food. The Hebrews had been a people worked by Pharaoh seven days a week. With no time for rest or for enjoying the bounty of God's creation. In Egypt, life was work and work was life. The initiation of the Sabbath changes that understanding of life. Life is not all about acquiring but now includes rest and trust. It also reinforces the transformation of the calendar from Egyptian cyclical/seasonal/nature driven to a weekly calendar driven by God's providence and presence.

Teachable moment four is the need to remember (16:31-36). This moment once again teaches the people about the power of collective memory (like that of remembering the Passover); that without a collective memory the people will forget all that God has done for them.

Teachable moment five is once again the need for water (17:1-7). Just as this section opened with cries about water, it will close with them as well. The teachable moment this time is another reminder that God can provide. Again, note that even though Moses is in danger and the people are in rebellion, God doesn't become angry. Instead, God hears their cries and supplies their need.

**Reflection:** All human beings are conditioned by the communities in which they are raised. The values of the community become the values of the individual almost by osmosis. The Hebrews had learned to be Egyptian slaves. This meant their world view (community, economy, religion) were those of their captors. We have learned to be Americans with American world views. The gift of Exodus is that it reminds us that God's world view is often different not only from that of Egypt, but from our own. Our challenge is to allow these teachable moments to cause us to stop and consider whose world view guides our steps.

Questions:

1. Which of these teachable moments most appeals to you and why?
2. What would an equitable distribution of goods look like in our world today?
3. Where have you witnessed God providing for you?