



Caught between was and what will be

They want normalcy to return

By Bishop Kathy

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. . . and the people of Israel also wept again, and said, “O that we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at.” Numbers 11:4b-6

It is two years after the Exodus and the people of Israel are not very happy with their food choices. There is manna for dinner today, just as it was manna yesterday. And going by past experience it is going to be manna for a long time to come. And so they cried out to their leaders and cried out to God wishing for a different outcome.

We have heard God’s people crying out before this. However, it was most often when they were in dire straits. Like arriving at the Red Sea with the Pharaoh’s army hot on their heels and being afraid they would die in a watery grave. Or not having water to drink. Or enough food to eat. That’s how they got the manna they are complaining about now.

But this situation is very different from what happened when they escaped Egypt. They are not starving or dying of thirst. Their lives are not in danger. They are simply longing for what used to be. They want normalcy to return. They want to plant and see crops grow. They want to be with their families and have wonderful dinners with all their favorite dishes and flavours.

I think we can all identify with that. Except it’s not cucs and leeks, onions and garlic. The pandemic is ebbing, some normalcy has returned. Our church buildings have reopened, and worshipping together is possible. But still we arrive at church to find many empty pews when we wanted them to be filled with all our church family members we have missed so much or those new people we met online. Some experts say it might be as much as another year or two before people feel comfortable returning to church or other activities. When emptiness is the reality Sunday after Sunday, we fear for the future of our church. What will happen if people don’t return, or new people don’t show up? What will happen if offering dries up? What will happen if we don’t have enough volunteers to help do the work required to be God’s church?

Thankfully, I am writing this during Pentecost and so am reminded that the loving and life-giving presence of God is in all things through the Spirit, and it is freely accessible to everyone. As the Holy Spirit breathes new life into us all, indiscriminately, without any conditions, and essentially without constraint, we are set free from worrying about the outcomes, and instead can simply trust in God and God’s gifts to us. That means we are free to join in God’s work in our communities, love our neighbours, explore new ministries, tend the earth, work for justice and continue to share those bold and faithful words of God’s love for us and for everyone. And trust that God will see to the rest. “The One who calls us is faithful...”. 1 Thessalonians 5:24a.