Exodus 16:1-15 (NIV)

The whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt. In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the Lord’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.”

4 Then the Lord said to Moses, “I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days.”

6 So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “In the evening you will know that it was the Lord who brought you out of Egypt, and in the morning you will see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?”

8 Moses also said, “You will know that it was the Lord when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the Lord.”

9 Then Moses told Aaron, “Say to the entire Israelite community, ‘Come before the Lord, for he has heard your grumbling.’”

10 While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the Lord appearing in the cloud.

11 The Lord said to Moses, “I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, ‘At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning
you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God.’”

13 That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. 14 When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor.

15 When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was.

Moses said to them, “It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat.

Author Tim Timmons defines the "Pit Hour" as the period of time just before, during and after the evening meal.

It's the time when children come up to harried parents and whine: "When is supper going to be ready?" as well as the famous question: "What's to eat?" which, when answered, usually results in comments like: "Yuck, I don't like that." or "Not that again!"

The "Pit Hour" continues as the food is served and played with but not eaten by the children. It reaches its climax as the question is asked: "How much of this stuff do I have to eat?"

Parental response to the "Pit Hour" varies.

Some try to coax the children to eat by reminding them that they did, indeed, like the same food the last time it was served.

Others use the old "Think of the starving children in China" routine.

Still others respond by replying: "I don't care if you don't like it---eat it anyway!"
God is like a parent to God's people. Fortunately, God is able to handle the "Pit Hours" better than we do.

One such "Pit Hour" is detailed for us in our Scripture lesson---Exodus 16:1-15.

The people of Israel had been delivered out of slavery in Egypt. They were in the desert making their way to the "Promised Land". But things didn't work out exactly to their liking.

They were hungry.
They were in the desert and they were hungry.

So they began to complain. They complained to Moses and his brother Aaron.

It was all their fault.

In Egypt they were slaves but at least they were well-fed slaves. What had Moses done---brought them to freedom so they could starve to death?

Grumble, complain and murmur---this was their diet---this is what they fed on as they felt so hard done by.

In fact, they should have been giving thanks for being delivered out of slavery but, suddenly, with hungry stomachs, even Egypt looked good.

It's interesting to see how the Lord responded to the complaints of that particular "Pit Hour".
God accepted their complaints without any anger or disappointment and then went on to make provisions for their needs.

Manna, a special bread-like substance, was to be found on the ground every morning and quails arrived every night.

Bread in the morning and meat at night.
No more worries about going hungry!

Surprisingly, perhaps, God didn’t respond with anger but, instead, with provisions.

It’s also interesting to note the way God provided.

The Manna and the quails didn’t arrive with bolts of lightning or crashing thunder. This wasn’t a heart stopping type miracle. The Lord met the needs of the people for food through very natural means.

Scholars tell us that, even to this day, Manna can be found in the wilderness. It comes from an excretion of the tamarisk tree. In the cool of the morning the juice of the tree forms a yellowish white flake or ball which is very sweet and nutritious. It’s gathered by natives who bake it into a bread. The flakes must be gathered before the heat of the day because they decay quickly and attract ants.

It’s, also, not unknown for flocks of migrating birds to be blown off course over Africa or the Mediterranean and end up in the desert where they are so exhausted they’re able to be scooped up by hunters with no trouble at all.

The explanation for the Manna and the quails may be very natural, then.
This doesn't take away the wonder of what happened, for God still provided food and did so consistently for years. But it does say that our needs are often met in ways we might easily take for granted.

Provisions, not with thunder and lightning, but just an ordinary, nothing fancy answer to needs.

The Manna and the quails were to be picked up every morning and evening. It became a daily routine.

Indeed, it became so much of a routine that, after a while, the people began to grumble and complain about being tired of the Manna.

Two things need to be said about what our lesson is teaching us. Two things that are related.

First, God hears our complaints and God responds.

Complaining to God is not new nor does it only occur in Scripture with the Israelites in the desert. There are over 50 Psalms of Lament where God hears the complaints of the Psalmist. The Book of Job is full of grumbling. Characters such as Jeremiah and Jonah issued complaints several times.

Complaining to God doesn't necessarily bring anger from God. God is remarkably patient and tolerant of our murmurings. God hears and accept our concerns. God seeks to respond to our needs.

This is where the second point comes in.
Often the response God offers is a natural answer that can go either unnoticed or unappreciated.

God doesn't always work in large miraculous terms. More often than not, God answers with small gifts---so small and so natural that we might miss them as coming from God.

One of my favourite stories to illustrate this is about the lady who was very concerned about missing a plane departure. She was running late as she approached the airport parking lot. As she turned in she prayed that God would have a parking space for her that was close to the entrance.

"Please, please, please Lord let there be a space that will save me some time."

As she prayed this prayer she turned the corner and there at the front door, someone was pulling out of a space.

She concluded her prayer with: "Oops, never mind Lord, there's a space right there."

Often times, when we are in the midst of problems, we ask the question: "Where is God?"

We know we need God's help and God's presence but God just doesn't seem to be around---or is He? We may even complain or shake our fists at God in frustration.

How often, though, do we look deeper at what is happening and recognize God's presence in what appear, at first, just the normal events of life?

How often are we sensitive to the fact that the friend who came by to listen to our hurts was really a gift from the Lord?
How sensitive are we to the concept that the closing of a door we hoped for, so much, might just result in the opening of a better window? That window, which seems less important to us, just might result in a blessing that is far greater than what we had hoped for.

How often do we recognize that who and what come into our lives, in a seemingly random way when we are struggling, just might be God offering God’s help and presence to us?

I remember speaking to a lady, many years ago, who was really struggling in life. She questioned her faith. She questioned all the opportunities being denied her. She wondered whether life with all the hassles was really worth it. And, also, where was God and why didn’t God fix things?

One of her frustrations had to do with not getting into some courses she wanted. There was one particular course she had her sights on. We talked about several alternatives in case the course didn’t come through. She wasn’t hopeful.

A while later I spoke to her and found that she had been accepted for the course. Still she didn’t really see this as help from God. After wanting it and getting it, she just couldn’t see God in the midst of it.

Sometimes, we can be so caught up in the attitude of complaint, we miss God’s answer. The answer can seem so normal, so mundane that we don’t recognize it as from God.

Sometimes, we don’t even see it as an answer.

Yet God continues to work with us in the daily grind. God continues to speak to us in the common experiences and common routines of our life.
God used common things like Manna and quails to feed the Israelites.

God uses common things like bread and wine to declare God's everlasting love and commitment to us through the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

God doesn't always answer with deafening proclamations or startling, breath taking miracles. The Lord often answers with a whisper and seeming coincidence that we miss if we aren't in tune with God.

One of the commentators on this passage used the term "the discipline of dailyness". What he meant was developing a sensitivity for God in the daily routine---in the normal events of life.

We make a mistake thinking God is with us only when we are moved by a hymn or touched in the midst of troubles or saved from some pending disaster. These are emotional expressions of a reality that is really always there.

God stands with us all the time and seeks to communicate with us more often than not: as we close our eyes for a moment's rest or open a notebook to study for an exam or clear away the table of dishes after supper.

God's answers to our needs are all around us because God is all around us---always.

Our challenge is to develop a "discipline of dailyness" to seek God's presence, trust that it is there and praise God for that constant blessing!

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