

Reflection Exodus 16: 1 – 5, 9 – 15 Revd Linda E Hunter 23rd July 2025

In the stillness of the wilderness, just as the people begin to feel so hungry, something extraordinary happens.

"In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground... They said to one another, 'What is it?'" (Exodus 16:13–15)

In Hebrew, the phrase is *man hu?* which is where we get the word *manna* from. The people didn't understand what they were seeing. They didn't expect bread to come like this, in such an unexpected form, in such a dry place

But isn't that often how God works?

The Israelites were not yet in the Promised Land. They were in between places, wandering, wondering, even grumbling. Their situation was uncertain, and their patience was running thin. They questioned God, and they questioned Moses. They wanted security, stability, and the familiarity of Egypt, even if Egypt had been a place of slavery.

It is in this spiritual and emotional wilderness that God provides.

The wilderness is more than just a physical place, it is a spiritual metaphor. Each of us, at different times in life, journeys through our own wilderness: seasons marked by doubt, hardship, waiting, or disorientation. Yet throughout Scripture, the wilderness is not merely a place of desolation, but a place of encounter. It is often in these barren and uncertain spaces that God draws near. Why? Here we are brought face to face with our need. We become hungry enough, spiritually and emotionally, to recognize the quiet, often overlooked gifts of God's presence and provision.

The manna is described in almost poetic terms: "fine as frost," a "flaky substance." It wasn't what they expected. It wasn't what they'd known before. And yet, it was exactly what they needed.

In this way, the manna points toward a greater gift, the Bread of Life, the true Bread from Heaven, which we receive in the Eucharist.

When we come to the Eucharist, we are in many ways echoing the same wonder and confusion of the Israelites: *"What is it?"*

At the table, we see simple bread and wine. But we also hear the words of Jesus: *"This is my body, given for you."* And in faith, we receive, Christ himself. The manna in the wilderness was God's provision, but the Eucharist is God's own self-giving love, offered again and again. In this simple meal is all the nourishment we need for our souls.

God told the Israelites to gather only what they needed for the day. If they tried to store it, it would spoil. They had to trust that each morning, God would provide again.

The Eucharist is like that too. It is not something we receive once and for all, but a continual invitation. It is our “daily bread,” not just in a literal sense, but spiritually. It reminds us that it is not possible to hoard God’s grace, it is a relationship to be lived, day by day, in dependence and trust.

Each time we come to the table, we are reminded of our need, and God’s faithful provision. Each time we receive, we do so just like those in the wilderness: hungry, tired, and hopeful.

The Israelites didn’t recognize the manna at first. It didn’t look like “bread.” It didn’t match their expectations. In the same way, the presence of Christ in the Eucharist is hidden in the ordinary. But faith allows us to see and receive.

I recently read in a book that Saint Augustine said of the Eucharist: *“Behold what you are; become what you receive.”* We are the Body of Christ, because we have received the Body of Christ. The Eucharist doesn’t just feed us, it transforms us. Like the manna, it sustains us on a journey. Our journey of becoming: becoming more like Christ, learning to trust more deeply, to love more fully, to live more freely.

The story of the manna is a story about trust. It’s about learning to live in daily dependence on God. It’s about recognizing that God is present even in the wilderness, even in the quiet dew of morning. And it’s about receiving what God gives, even if it doesn’t look like what we expected.

Each time we approach the altar, we echo that same movement of faith. We may not fully understand the mystery of the Eucharist, but we come with open hands, open hearts, and the same question: *“What is it?”* And the same answer is given to us:

“It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat.”

And in that bread, we find Christ, our manna, our sustenance, our daily bread.