

“What’s for lunch?”

1. The birds who live in the woods around our house sing loudly every morning.
 - a. With windows open overnight on cool evenings, when dawn breaks we can plainly hear the birds begin their singing.
 - b. I sit with my morning coffee by an open window and the house is flooded with their songs.
 - c. I even have an app on my phone that helps me identify them. Cardinals and wrens have these songs with sharp staccato notes. I enjoy hearing them. I try to remind myself to stop and listen, to notice them. I take in their call.
 - d. A writer helped me think about their songs like praises to God. What are the lyrics of their different tunes, I wonder, sung in bird languages I don’t speak?
 - e. This one here sings and another far away responds. It’s like an antiphonal church choir concert. Every morning!
 - f. In listening to these birds while thinking about this morning’s passages, I realized something both unremarkable and profound: The bird songs don’t sound different when I have forgotten to refill our birdfeeder for days and when I finally get to it and fill it to the brim.
 - g. Not that their only food is what we set out there for them, but since their song doesn’t change based on my offering of seeds to them, it makes me think that the lyrics to their song probably aren’t “When is this guy going to refill the feeder!” or “Hey look, everyone, he got the cheap bird food again!”
 - h. Nope. To my ears, they’re singing about their life, about the sun coming up, about being part of a community. With their peppy tunes, it’s hard not to imagine they’re singing about joy.
2. The song the humans are singing in our Bible passages is loud, but it isn’t joyful. It’s unsettled, angry, despairing. And it happens to be about food, or at least it’s presenting like it is.
 - a. In our first passage, we catch up to the Israelites in the desert, having been liberated from Egyptian slavery.
 - i. But they were miserable.
 - ii. Their journey had been very tough in the harshness of the unwelcoming wilderness
 - iii. Like a lost wanderer seeing a mirage of water that isn’t there, they looked back on their memories and remembered (or thought they remembered) the good old days when they were slaves and they ate their fill of a rich variety of food.
 - iv. Right...
 - v. In the desert they had complained loudly to God, who had provided this manna, but they were already bored with this miraculous food.
 - vi. Then they started saying: meat! We want meat! If only we had meat!
 - vii. It was an unhappy bunch.
 1. The Israelites complained bitterly (even with a belly full of manna)
 2. And Moses had had enough of these bickering people, and felt like God had abandoned him and them.

- viii. And frankly God wasn't happy with them either
 - ix. When eventually God did provide them some meat (countless quails literally fell out of the sky), God was angry, and the people got a stomach ache
 - x. Don't get me wrong, the story isn't about romanticizing their slavery or their hunger or their journey in the desert.
 - xi. It was hard, but so had been their time in Egypt.
 - xii. For them to make up fake memories of the good old days was just their grief talking, reacting to their current hardships.
 - xiii. They didn't seem to find a song in them with lyrics of gratitude or joy, not even a sad song looking forward to better days ahead.
- b. In the gospel passage, the disciples were in the middle of a crash course on service, and they were exhausted.
- i. Prior to our passage, Jesus had prepared and then sent the disciples out on their own to minister
 - ii. They had healed and anointed many, and they were telling Jesus all that had gone on
 - iii. And so Jesus calls for a desert retreat, where they could all go to a secluded place by themselves and get refreshed.
 - iv. Only the people, who always managed to crowd them, coming in desperation seeking healing and help, found them and spoiled their retreat.
 - v. No rest. No refreshment. No time to bask in the stories of their achievements
 - vi. No: instead it was those needy people. Again.
 - vii. But their two reactions stand in contrast:
 1. Jesus had compassion for the crowd. He stayed with them and taught them
 2. The disciples had disdain for the crowd.
 3. "Send them away to get food!" The disciples grumbled, not really worried about their hunger but wanting to be left alone
 4. "You give them something to eat," Jesus replied, making this somehow still part of their on-the-job training.
 - viii. And Jesus asked a key question: "what do you have?"
 1. He didn't ask: "do you have enough?" Or "do you have extra?"
 2. Turns out they had five loaves of bread, two fish and a bad attitude.
 3. That hardly seems like the grocery list to feed 5,000 people
 4. But in the desert, God somehow manages to provide in miraculous ways
 5. And they all ate and were filled. Including the disciples who likely stayed mad, feeling cheated out of their retreat.
3. Stop and listen, both to the song you and I sing and what those around us sing, and ponder how we can make sure our lyrics are about joy and trust, even in the midst of challenges and uncertainty.
- a. On a Sunday when we gather to eat together at our annual picnic, and we may wonder what's for lunch (burgers and hotdogs, by the way), our scriptures are calling us to consider not only what fills our stomachs but what fills our hearts
 - b. We will experience a bounty of delicious, shared resources and loving community around these tables

- c. And we experience our hearts fill with the joy of being together, of spending time with beloved friends and family.
 - d. We experience gratitude for our fathers and those who were the fatherly figure we needed at the right time in our growing up.
 - e. We experience awe knowing that the Spirit moves within us and through us
 - i. as we stand up in solidarity with neighbors who are trying to make ends meet week in and week out
 - ii. as we advocate for neighbors who are unhoused, or who deal with mental health challenges, or who live in the shadows because of their immigration status
 - iii. as we work to be better allies with our LGBTQ neighbors.
 - f. Those efforts, even those struggles, fill our hearts with the joy and courage from God which we need to follow the way Jesus is leading us
 - g. No, it's not easy, certainly not as we and our neighbors have our moments in the wilderness, when life gets really hard and we wonder if God's still with us
 - h. The passages are reminding us to consider the provision God already gives us, so we can be open to the way the Spirit will multiply what to us may seem like "not enough"
 - i. Remember that Jesus asked his disciples how many loaves they had. Surely not enough! Yes Jesus took what they had to feed the crowd.
 - ii. Go and see how much you have...
 - 1. We have manna all around us,
 - 2. we have these little loaves and fishes on the pantry,
 - 3. They're the blessings of support which may take for granted (a healthy church, a loyal friend, a wise grandparent)
 - iii. These biblical stories encourage us to lean into our faith and into these resources God has given us already, whatever their quantity and to share them with a glad heart.
4. Even in the wilderness, especially in the wilderness, we are encouraged to seek what God gives us to fill and renew not just our stomach, but our heart. And the birds remind us to keep singing joyfully about what God has done in our lives.

Sources: <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-26-2/commentary-on-numbers-114-6-10-16-24-29-5>

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-16-2/commentary-on-mark-630-34-53-56-5>

Reflection questions :

1. Think of a time when something / someone you took for granted became an important blessing to you.
2. How do you relate to the Israelites making up nice memories of their harsh past when their present was so hard (Numbers 11:4–15)?
3. Read Mark 6:30–44. Consider a difficulty you're dealing with. If Jesus asks what you have available to you ("How many loaves do you have?"), what helpful though overlooked resource do you discover?