

1-1-2016

## A Communion Meditation

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### Recommended Citation

Zahler, Andrea (2016) "A Communion Meditation," *Leaven*: Vol. 24 : Iss. 1 , Article 10.  
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/leaven/vol24/iss1/10>

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# A Communion Meditation

Andrea Zahler

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**T**he Israelites had just been rescued from hundreds of years of slavery. God himself had heard their cries and come to their aid. Waters of the sea had been parted to make way for their escape and those same waters came crashing down upon their former Egyptian captors. They no longer had to live in fear or toil for harsh masters. Once on the opposite shore of the Red Sea, they all sang and danced in joy because they were finally free.

It took about six weeks after leaving Egypt for the whole community to start grumbling. “If only we had died by the LORD’s hand in Egypt,” they cried. “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 to death!” Then the LORD said to Moses, “Okay, I will rain down bread from heaven for you.”

That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew, and when it was gone thin flakes like frost appeared on the desert floor. When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, “*Manna?*” or “What is this?” because they had never seen anything like it before. It was white like coriander seeds and tasted like wafers made with honey.

Moses said to them, “It is the bread the LORD has given you to eat. Each one is to gather as much as he needs, but no one is to keep any of it until morning.” However, some of them paid no attention and kept what they gathered, but by the next morning it was full of maggots and began to smell.

And the LORD commanded Moses, “Take a measure of manna and keep it for the generations to come so they can see the bread I gave you to eat in the desert when I brought you up out of Egypt.”

Later, when Moses was preparing the people for life in the promised land, he urged them: “When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your wealth grows and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. He led you through the vast and dreadful desert. He brought you water out of hard rock. He gave you manna to eat in the desert, something the world had never known until then. You may say to yourself, ‘My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.’ But remember the LORD your God.” (Deut 8.10–18)

And the people did remember, sort of. Sometimes. Well, they remembered the story, the “what is it,” but not the lesson in the story, not the “why is it.”

It’s easy to judge the Israelites for their lack of trust in God when we forget that they were real people living in real time. It’s hard being human. When yesterday you were a slave and today you’re in a desert and tomorrow you don’t know what’s going to happen, and you’re trying to keep your family not just together but alive, and there is bread on the ground right now that will melt away if you don’t grab it, why wouldn’t you? It makes sense to store up supplies for an unknown future, especially after what you’ve been through. Only . . . the bread starts to stink of greed and fear, and worms that live in the dust and dirt find their way inside.

It's easy to lose hope when we forget that God is real and present with us now. That after he heard his people grumble in hunger and thirst and fear and hatred, God said, "Okay, I will send down my son, the Bread of Life, from heaven for you." And Jesus spoke with authority, healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, forgave sins, and raised the dead so that the people looked at each other and said, "Who is this?" because they had never seen anything like him before.

And they established this Eucharist, communion, to keep for generations to come so that we would remember how the LORD saved us from fear and harsh masters and how he keeps us alive as we move through the desert toward the promised land. So we remember, "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself" (Matt 6.33–34).

I AM here today. I AM here tomorrow. I AM here at the beginning. I AM here at the end. Do not worry. I AM enough. I AM enough. I AM enough.

And each day we open our eyes and join the people of God saying, "His compassions never fail! They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, 'The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him. The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him.'" (Lam 3.22–25)

Our God is a spring of living water; our God is daily bread; our God is the one who makes new things every morning so that we look at each other and say, "What is this? I've never seen anything like it before!" Our God has rescued us and is sustaining us and will give us life that is truly life.

We are called to live in freedom—to come out of Egypt with its pots of meat, to come out of sin with its fear of tomorrow, and to trust in the presence of the LORD.

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