



January 8, 2020

Coming to Grips with the God Who Is Beyond Words

And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD. - (Deuteronomy 8:2-3)

In Exodus 34:29-25, the Israelites, in essence, ask Moses to put a lampshade over his head because of the brilliance of his face. Now, you might get the impression this is weird, you're right. There actually is a direct relationship between weird things and holy things. One use of the word weird is to indicate that an experience is strange, uncanny, or has a sense of the supernatural about it. From that perspective, everything described—from Moses's shining face to Jesus glowing on the mountain—is truly weird. It's supernatural, out of this world. That is what holy is, something wholly otherworldly.

God is so "other" that he is literally "out of this world" and should never be identified with any physical thing in this world. It is this total otherness, this holiness, this weirdness that makes most people not want to get close to God. They want to have just enough of God to make their little train chug on down the track, something to fix them up, a cosmic aspirin to help them get on with their own business.

The Israelites had a hard time learning this. Not long after their liberation from Egypt, as God led them through the Sinai desert, lots of very strange things were happening. Water flowed from rocks and massive flocks of quail appeared, but the Israelites could only think of their former lifestyle with its leeks, onions, garlic, and nice soft beds, forgetting that they were slaves. So God responded with more weirdness in the form of manna, which was quite a strange phenomenon.

You see, the Israelites knew all about the food of Egypt, but no one knew anything about manna. It was a mystery to them until they trekked across the wilderness. It was strange stuff: the congealed word of God. According to Exodus 16, it did not grow on any shrub; it was not an animal that could be hunted down and served up; it was not a crop that could be sown and harvested. It just appeared every morning lying on the ground for the people to gather before it melted in the sun. They were instructed to gather a one-day supply for each person in the family on Sunday through Thursday each week. And whether they gathered more or less than that, they always had exactly the right amount. That's weird. If they tried to save some of it for the next day (just in case God didn't provide), it rotted and had to be thrown out. Then on Fridays, they were told to gather a two-day supply to last through Saturday, the Sabbath day of rest. The extra day's manna didn't rot. That's weird too.

Practice: *But the Israelites eventually tired of it and whined to Moses, "We're sick of manna! Takes us back to what we were used to in Egypt! At least the food was spicy!" (Num. 11:4-6 PAR). And of course, this was a litmus test of their hearts, to gauge whether they did, in fact, want nothing more than the God who had rescued them. They didn't.*

(Q) It can be the same for us, often we confuse ourselves by thinking we want God and his presence in our lives when in actuality, we are only interested in God's presents? Make no mistake, growth in Christlikeness require us to learn to live on weird stuff, as we draw near to God.