

**Sunday, September 30, 2018 – Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**“Remember Everything”**

Numbers 11: 4-6; 10-16; 24-29

Rev. Derek S. Klemm, Mountain View Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV  
Dynamic Reversal Structure

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Nostalgia, that delightful and yet melancholy longing for the way things were comes to all of us at some point or another. The memory can be sparked by a reference, a song, a place. Or food – definitely, food.

The people of Israel are remembering their history. Here they are, in the desert, Moses leading them. They're remembering how they got here, from living in Egypt to here, with Moses in the desert. If you grew up going to church, you're probably picturing that story in your mind's eye, depending on your age and your own kind of nostalgia Moses is Charleton Heston. Or maybe you're thinking of Sunday school and the flannel board people. Or if you're currently in your teens or 20s, the Veggie Tales version. Wherever your own memory took you, you might remember all the ways God saved – plagues in Egypt. Passover dinner. The parting of the Red Sea. On that day, Israel remembered everything. On that day, Israel looked in faith upon her present experience. She saw God's strength and lifted her voice in a song of praise: "The Lord is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation" (Ex 15:2). Her song of faith closed with trust in God for the future (Ex 15:17–18).

Memory, however is selective and nostalgic. Selective because we remember only what fits with what we're feeling now. Nostalgia because we remember in a way that glamorizes the past – no matter how bad that past is. Israel's memory is selective, nostalgic and deceptive. And as Israel is sparked to nostalgia by their food in the desert, they start to remember. They start to misremember. Her slavery, once recorded in detail, is gone and the food she once ate, remembered in detail, is suddenly free (v. 5). This selective memory transforms Israel. Instead of singing praise, she voices a lament (v. 4–6). Instead of celebrating God's strength, she cries

of her weakness (v. 6). And, when God gives her manna, rather than take and eat, she looks and laments (v. 6).

What we see in Israel is a spiritual disposition, the inability to see God's present blessing because of a distorted memory of the past. In a sense, this sin is a variation of coveting. Rather than covet what someone else has in the present, Israel covets her own past – not even what she really had, mind you, but the way that she remembers it. The end result, however, is the same. God's present gifts are devalued because of the way one remembers the past. God gives Israel manna, yet she looks on it with disgust and complaints.

You know, today we can still fall into this sin. Memories of the past can cause us to miss God's what God is doing right in front of us. These memories may be personal or communal. Are there glory days you pine for, of your family, your community, your country? You know, churches can be this way too – the way we used to do things. Glory days of the past hide the glory that is present, hidden in our midst, as God speaks and forgives.

God's response to Israel's sin is like God's response to all sin. There's both judgment and grace. The judgment is edited out of our reading today by our friendly lectionary committee (vv. 18–23). When Israel cries over a lack of meat, God answers her with abundance, abundance so great that Israel is sickened by it – a divine, "You want meat? I'll give you meat!" God's judgment invites Israel to see that faith is not a matter of things but a relationship. Faith is trust in the one who gives strength regardless of circumstances (Phil 4:11–13). But you can relate, can't you? To Israel? That thing you've been praying for, longing for, that you just want so bad to happen, and why won't God come through for you? While the judgment is hidden, the grace is apparent in our reading. God sees a deeper problem for Israel and Moses. It is not a need for physical food to satisfy their physical craving but a need for his word to shape their spiritual formation, bringing them to deeper trust in him. In response to this deeper need, God answers in abundance, an abundance of the Spirit and an abundance of prophets. Seventy elders gather around the tent of meeting, God's earthly dwelling place in the camp of Israel, and

receive the Spirit, prophesying to the people. Not only that, but even in the camp, Eldad and Medad are prophesying. When confronted with this anomaly, Moses looks with hope to the future, longing for the day when the Spirit of God will be poured out upon all people.

Well friends, guess what – the day Moses dreamed of seeing is here. It has been here since the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, since people started being baptized. Everything is flipped on its' head - In the beginning of our reading we get a word of grumbling from the outskirts of the camp (v. 4) that perverted God's people, blinding them to God's present grace (v. 5). At the end, the word of God comes from the central place of God's speaking (the tent of meeting) to the farthest reaches of his people (the camp) and reveals his present work. God provides: food for the weary, leadership for the lost, a life of trust in the present, and a vision of hope for the future (v. 29). No wonder that when this event is recalled in Deuteronomy God's people are encouraged to remember that "man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord" (Dt 8:3).

When your nostalgia leads you to covet what you once had or think you once had, when you look at your situation with a sense of desperation and loss, see the gracious transformation of God – who turns poverty to abundance, memory into hope, physical need into spiritual gifts – through the very real, present right here and right now speaking of God to your life today. In Jesus' name, Amen.