



**VILLAGE  
CHURCH**

Presbyterian (USA)

# Tasting Faith

SCRIPTURE:  
Psalm 34:8

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August 7, 2022 – Sermon by Rev. Dr. Rodger Nishioka

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**I**n Ephesians 2:8, the writer says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not your own doing; it is a gift of God...”. Faith is a gift. And I believe it comes to us in a variety of ways. Sometimes, it comes through taste.

So as we are talking about tasting faith, we start with the marvelous story of the Hebrew people as they are freed from slavery in Egypt. The scripture passages begins with, “The whole congregation of the Israelites set out from Elim.”

When it says ‘the whole congregation’ earlier in Exodus 12:37, we get a head count. It says there were 600,000 men. We don’t know for certain, of course, but scholars note that the number is only men. There would be women and children. Conservative estimates say about three million. Let’s ponder that. The state population of Kansas is about 2.95 million. So, get this: The exodus of the Hebrews out of Egypt is like taking the entire population of Kansas and saying, “Everyone. Listen up. We’re moving. To the promised land. We’re going to...Cleveland.”

They set out from Elim and come to the wilderness of Sin. That’s actually a place, not a condition. Remember our senior pastor, Tom, has said this to us and he’s exactly right. In the Bible, whenever it talks about wilderness, it is always a place of testing. Perk up. Pay attention. Remember when Jesus went into the wilderness after he was baptized? What happened? He was tested by Satan.

So the Israelites end up in the wilderness of Sin. It’s between Elim and Sinai, the Bible says. This was the 15th day of the second month after they departed from the land of Egypt. It’s been 45 days. They don’t know this, but we do. How long did it take the Hebrew people to get to the promised

land? Forty years. It’s been 45 days and listen what happens. The whole congregation—three million of them—complained against Moses and Aaron. Who is Moses? He’s the one God called to free the Hebrew people. Who is Aaron? Moses’ brother. So the people complained against Moses and Aaron. “If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into the wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” If only God had killed us in Egypt where we had stew on the fire and bread instead of being out here where we are so hungry?

You can hear the Hebrews complaining. “We’re tired. We’re hot. How much longer? Where are you taking us?” My goodness! Would you like some cheese with that whine?

It is the 45th day of 40 years and they are starting to complain already. It’s like you are 10 minutes into your road trip and have just left your driveway and a voice from the back seat has the nerve to ask, “Are we there, yet?” And you’re like, “Wait. What? We aren’t even out of our neighborhood!” “I know, but I’m bored!”

But listen how God responds. God says to Moses, “I am going to rain bread from heaven for you and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way, I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not. On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on the other days.” Why twice as much on the sixth day? “Because the seventh day is a day of rest. It’s the sabbath and no work can be done on that day including going out and gathering food.”

So Aaron and Moses relay all this to the people. That night there appeared quail, enough to feed

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three million and in the morning, a flaky substance that tasted like honey. No one had ever seen this before so they asked, "What is it?" They discovered that it tasted sweet like honey. It became known as 'manna' which is Aramaic for, "What is it?"

Years ago I was traveling to Debrecen, a city in Eastern Hungary near the Romanian border. The World Alliance of Reformed Churches was holding its quadrennial meeting and I was honored to be one of the persons from the United States to serve on the planning committee. This was my first trip to Hungary and because of my schedule, I arrived about a day late. I missed the group bus from the airport in Budapest so was told to get a taxi to the train station and then catch a train across Hungary to Debrecen. I had traveled through parts of Europe and thought, "Sure, I can do this."

So I landed and caught a taxi to the train station and then bought a ticket to Debrecen. All this time, I was struggling to understand and be understood. Hungarian is a unique language. It has a small linguistic tie to Finnish and that's it. No relationship to German or French or Russian or Romanian and certainly not English. So, I got my ticket and realized that the train was leaving soon so I didn't have time to exchange money to buy something to eat but I thought I would surely get something on the train. It was about a five-hour train ride.

Many of you know that in train stations throughout the world there is a guide posted that shows you how many cars and what tracks so you can find your car and your seat. I found the poster and went to the track. The train was already there so I found the car and then found my cabin and then found my seat. The train was an older one and on each car, there were several cabins and each cabin had two benches facing each other with room for four people on each bench. I found my seat, put my bags up in the rack and sat down relieved to be on the train. Just as I was relaxing, a young woman came into the compartment and looked right at me and asked me a question. In Hungarian. I knew she was talking to me but did not know what she was saying so I did the universal "I don't understand" gesture and she showed

me her ticket. I looked at it and sure enough, she had the same car, the same cabin, and the same seat. Then she put her hand out and I pulled out my ticket and showed it to her and then she started talking to me again and to the people around me. They all looked at my ticket and hers and I eventually realized that I was in the right car, the right cabin, the right seat, on the wrong train.

So I got up and got my things and got off that train and headed back to the central part of the train station. As I got there, I saw a man in a uniform and I showed him my ticket and he started talking to me in Hungarian. When he realized I had no idea what he was saying, he reached out and grabbed my roller bag and I followed him back down the platform to the main train station and three tracks over and he walked me to my car. He spoke to another man who was standing by the train and that gentleman helped me get my bag on the train and walked me to my compartment. I sat down and a few moments later, the train began to pull away from the station. I was exhausted.

I fell asleep. A little while later, I was woken up by the woman sitting next to me moving. I could feel her moving because I had fallen asleep on her shoulder. She was quite a bit shorter than me and I had leaned over and was half sleeping on her shoulder and her head. The poor woman. I was asleep on her. I looked up and saw the people sitting across from me and they were all looking alarmed. I tried to apologize to the lady and she smiled and patted my hand but then clearly pushed me away.

Then, as if on cue, everyone started reaching for their bags and cases and started pulling out food to eat. They had all packed lunches for themselves. I got up and went looking for the café car. I walked up and down the entire train. That's when I found out there was no café car. So I came back to my compartment and sat down. They were eating their lunches and the woman next to me on whom I had been sleeping asked me a question gesturing to her lunch. I gestured that I didn't have any food. I pulled out my bottle of water and that was it. She was cutting up an apple and offered me a piece. I put my hand out to say, "no." It's an Asian thing.

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I've been trained this way. Whenever someone offers you anything, you refuse until they offer it to you again then you are free to accept it. She insisted and took my hand and put a slice of apple in it. It was delicious.

Then one of the women who was sitting across from me produced a small bowl and put some of her stew in it and handed it to me with a spoon. I recognized the potatoes and carrots and cabbage and... something that I think was meat although I don't know. It was a little chewy and gamy. And it, too, was delicious. Then the man next to me, who was eating sausage and cheese, cut up some cheese and sausage and gave it to me.

I realized it became sort of a game. Someone would give me food and I would eat it and they would watch my reaction. The high point came when the man with the sausage and cheese took out a clear bottle of liquid and poured some in a small glass. I thought it might be this famous Hungarian sweet wine. It was not. It was more like Hungarian moonshine. I swallowed it and went "puuaaah!" And they all burst out laughing. Then they started to mimic me in front of me. Talking in Hungarian, then going "puuaaah" and laughing all

over again. Several of them were in tears they were laughing so hard. And I was laughing with them. He tried to get me to drink more but I said, "no."

For the rest of the trip, during a lull, all anyone had to do was blurt out, "puuaaah" and we would all start laughing again. When we got to Debrecen, every one of them hugged me. The man who gave me the drink walked with me out of the station. I showed him the address of the hotel where we were meeting and he told the cab driver and paid for my ride. Then he hugged me, too. Not before going "puuaaah" one more time and walking away laughing.

The Hebrew people are in the wilderness and hungry. They have left behind everything that they knew. And God provides them a taste of faith and proclaims I am still with you. I am on a train in the middle of Hungary. Don't know anyone. Can't speak the language. And I am hungry in Hungary. And God provides a taste of faith to proclaim to me that I am still with you.

Friends, faith comes to us many ways. So taste and see that the Lord is with us. That the Lord is good. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Puuaaah. Amen.