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Legacy: Nostalgia
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Exodus 16:1-12

16The whole congregation of the Israelites set out from Elim; and Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. ²The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. ³The Israelites said to them, "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 this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." ⁴Then the Lord said 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. ⁵On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days." ⁶So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "In the evening you shall know that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, ⁷and in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your complaining against the Lord. For what are we, that you complain against us?" ⁸And Moses said, "When the Lord gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the Lord has heard the complaining that you utter against him—what are we? Your complaining is not against us but" against the Lord. ⁹Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, 'Draw near to the Lord, for he has heard your complaining.'" ¹⁰And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud. ¹¹The Lord spoke to Moses and said, ¹²"I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.'"

(slide 1: Legacy: nostalgia)

Like so many really great stories, it all started with one bad decision... Argonauts Summer Marching Band, of which I was the co-drum major, was traveling from Salem, Oregon to southern California to compete in the big end of season summer band shows. The plan was to leave in the late afternoon and drive overnight, then the bus company would switch out the drivers in the early morning and we would drive on through to arrive in the late afternoon. The plan was not the bad decision.

The bad decision was to choose the low bid bus company.

So there we were, 2 charter buses filled with 121 youth between the ages of 12 and 21, chaperones, directors, instruments, flags and all the field show gear, driving about 6 miles per hour over the Grapevine because the buses had overheated. Did I mention that it was the middle of August? The driver called for replacement buses, but the bus company had rented out their whole fleet. To draw some of the heat off of the engines and keep us going, the driver turned on the heat full blast and since it was one of those fancy, temperature controlled charter buses none of the windows were openable except the driver's wing window. For many miserable hours we were stuck in a metal box in the sun with the heat on full blast. I have no idea how hot it was inside that bus, in August, on the Grapevine. All I know is that when we stopped at a rest stop the 103 temperature outside felt sooo much cooler! That was the best summer marching season ever!

Isn't it funny, how we can look back at something that awful and say, what a great trip that was!

That's what we call nostalgia -- a sentimental longing or wistful affection for an idealized past.

In our reading for today the Israelites were experiencing some nostalgia.

It had been two months since they escaped from Egypt. Maybe the thrill of escape was wearing off? Maybe the reality of wandering around in the dessert was setting in? They were hungry, they were tired, they were living in tents with only the few possessions they could carry. They started to say, "remember, back in Egypt, when we used to sit and eat our fill? Why did we ever leave?!"

Food was plentiful in Egypt. The reason the ancient Egypt was able to build Pyramids is because the surplus production of food meant they had time to do something besides constantly hunting, gathering and farming. So yes, they did remember correctly that they had plenty to eat in Egypt, but in their nostalgia for the plentiful bread of Egypt, they kinda forgot about

the forced labor, the genocide of all the Hebrew male infants, the beatings, the killings... the reasons why they left in the first place.

That's nostalgia! In our memories the good things about the past seem better than maybe they really were and the pain of the bad things just seems, less important.

Nostalgia is neither bad nor good, it's just a feeling we have. And we can't really help but feel what we feel. I mean, have you ever had someone tell you to just "stop feeling that way?" How'd that work out?

We feel what we feel, it's neither good nor bad, it just is. And when we listen to our feelings we can learn some important things.

The Israelites' feelings of nostalgia were actually identifying a real need. They're feelings were right -- they needed food in order to make it through the journey to the promised land.

Sometimes nostalgia can help us better understand the legacy of the past

(Slide 2: Nostalgia can help us see: what did we have then that maybe we need now?)

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They had food back in Egypt and needed food now.

Egyptian bread was God's answer to the famine in the time of Joseph. It was a good answer then. It worked well then, until it didn't.

The need was still food, But the answer to that need was not to return to Egypt.

Why go back to Egypt for an old solution that is no longer working when God is doing a new thing? A new thing that leads us forward through the wilderness and into the promised land.

(Slide 3: Nostalgia can help us see what we need, but to find the way forward we need to pay attention to, and cooperate with, how God is answering that need now.)

Nostalgia can help us see what we need, but to find the way forward we need to pay attention to, and cooperate with, how God is answering that need now.

And that's not always easy. Because the future is unwritten - we don't know what God's new answer is going to look like yet. The idealized past always feels safer, more reliable, more certain that it really was at the time.

27 years later, it's easy to be nostalgic about that sweltering bus ride because it's part of what bonded youth from different schools, races and socioeconomic classes into a championship band.

But in the middle of that bus ride we weren't sure we were going to make it to our competition. When we stopped at the rest stop the Directors all huddled together around the pay phone discussing if we should turn around and go back.

The way back was downhill.

The way back was familiar.

The way back would take us right past the bus barn.

But going back would not have led to the Championship for Argonauts. Going back would not have led the Israelites to the promised land.

The truth is that there will be days when we're hungry and tired; overheated and overwhelmed. There will be days when it seems like the news is all bad and we just want to go back to "the good old days."

But as people of faith, when we look back with nostalgia to the “good old days” let us remember that we feel that they were good because God carried us through the challenges of the past.

As people of faith we have every reason to believe that God is leading us into a good future.

So let's continue to show up,
pay attention to what God is doing here and now,
cooperate with God as God leads us forward,
and then be prepared to wax nostalgic
as we tell the story of how God, once again, lead us forward into the
promised land.