

Exodus 16:2-15

(Lectionary Year A, Proper 20)

By Beth Barnett

This reading of the story of the Israelites grumbling and being fed in the wilderness is an opportunity to explore our response to hardship and blessings	
You will need:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Youtube clip of 'More than conquerors' (Rend Collective) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2p8_4NbrckA or alternative song of your choosing.• Alternating slides of sections of text and each of Chris Booth's four Exodus images
Time required:	7-10 minutes

Introduction

Last week we heard about the breath-taking narrow escape of the Hebrew slaves through the sea, and how they defeated the Egyptian army without a single weapon. As you can imagine the next thing that happens is that the people celebrate wildly – thanking and praising God in song and dance and with instruments. They don't hold back – the worshipping and celebrating goes on for ages!

No surprises there! They have been saved from slavery, and saved from certain death, given a second chance – who wouldn't go wild with worship? It's the same reason that when we gather as we do today we don't hold back – we praise God with all our hearts and bodies in enthusiastic passionate songs, because we have been freed and given life and second chances. In fact – why don't we stop and do that right now!

*Sing a rowdy song of praise of your own choosing or watch:
[More than conquerors \(Rend Collective\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2p8_4NbrckA)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2p8_4NbrckA*

More than Conquerors draws together many of the themes from the Exodus story so far.

Play the Youtube clip and invite people to call out when they hear something that reminds them of the story so far.

If you have the technological dexterity, pause the song to give people space to make their suggestions. Otherwise, simply encourage people to get rowdy.

Examples:

'You are the light'

'When waters rise'

'we are defiant'

'You are the fire that cannot be tamed'

'Every chain is breakable'

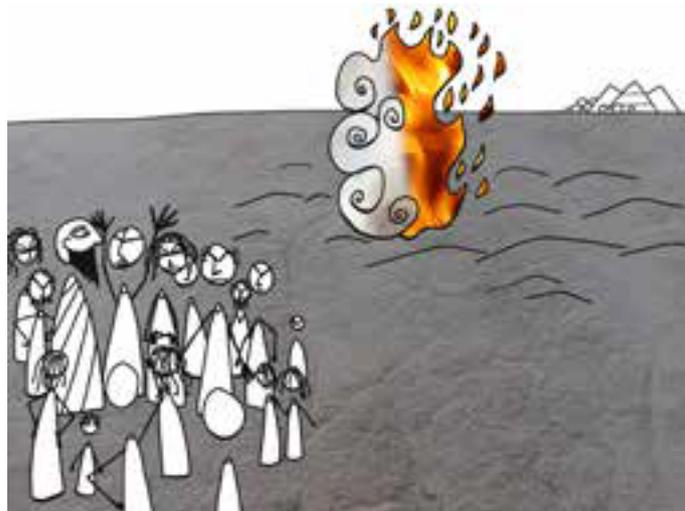
**note that this is not a song that celebrates violence. The idea of being 'more than conquerors' means 'not conquerors, but something better...defeating evil with peace not violence'*

If you have time, play the song a second time and encourage your gathering to join in singing.

Great celebration! But today, we turn the page and things are not so joyful.

Let's look:

Display *frame 1* and invite one person from your community to read the text
Frame 1



Exodus 16:2 The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.

Uh oh. What can be the problem? Why do you think there is complaining? What can you see in the picture that might have upset the Israelites.

Welcome accept and affirm all responses

Draw together a summary and add the following if necessary:

- *Egypt is a left far behind in the distance.*
- *Wilderness surrounds them on every side.*
- *There's just the people and Moses leading them.*
- *I wonder how Moses is feeling?*

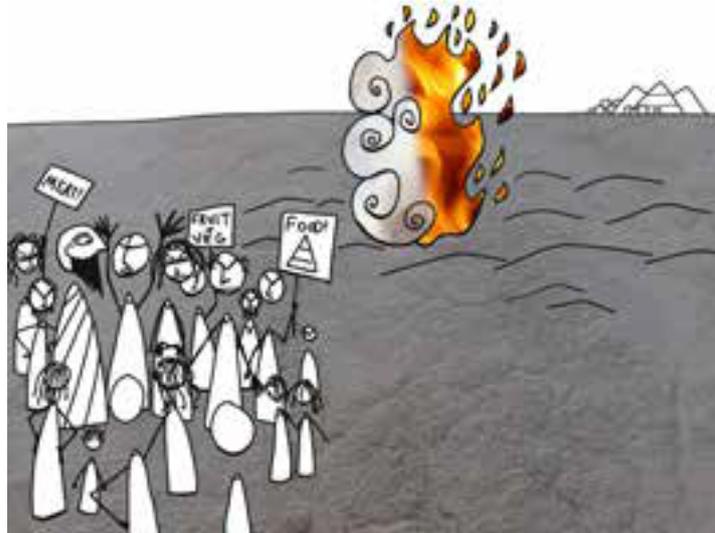
Let's look further...



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Display *frame 2*



What do you think is going here? What might the complaining be about?

Welcome accept and affirm all responses.

Let's read on together.

The Israelites express their feelings very fully in this part of the text.

So we need our most dramatic, impassioned inner drama queens to let loose.

Read the text, phrase by phrase and invite the group to repeat it with their best pathos and angst.

(If you are not comfortable with leading this arrange for someone with flair and confidence to lead ahead of time)

16:3 The 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."

What is worse - slavery or starvation?

Do you think their complaining is reasonable?

Shouldn't they have more faith and trust this impressive firey/cloudy God who just rescued them and defeated the Egyptian army?

Do you think God is going to listen to their complaining or be angry?

Has God listened to their cries before?

Ask the person next to you one of these questions.



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Allow a minute or two for pairs to respond to one another, then regroup and continue.

As we read on – the Lord answers Moses.

And here's the picture of what God says is going to happen.

Frame 3

What's happening here?



Welcome accept and affirm all responses, then summarise:

The complaining has stopped – and there is food to gather – birds and bread - and the presence of God is still burning brightly with them...looks like there might be a happy ending.

Let's read the way the this story unfolds in Exodus.

Choose someone to read this section in their best 'Voice of God'

16:4 Then 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.
16:5 On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in,
it will be twice as much as they gather on other days."

And choose two people to take turns in reading the phrases of Moses and Aaron.

16:6 So 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,
16:7 and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD,



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because he has heard your complaining against the LORD.
For what are we, that you complain against us?"
16:8 And 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."

This sounds great, doesn't it? I wonder what the next picture will show us?
Any guesses?

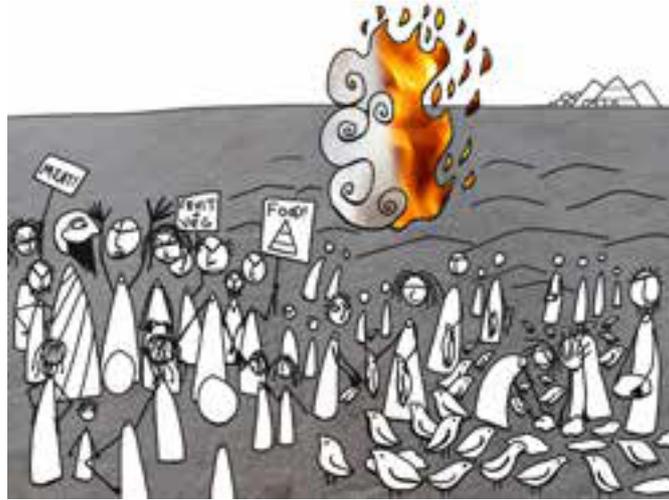
Welcome accept and affirm all responses.

My guess is that we'll see the Israelites all sitting down having a wonderful bird and bread dinner, happy as anything and grateful to God for providing for them. As we read this last part of the story, you are invited to join in on the words that begin with the letter C – congregation; complaining; cloud; came; covered; camp; watch out for them.

16:9 Then Moses said to Aaron,
"Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites,
'Draw near to the LORD, for he has heard your complaining.'"
16:10 And 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.
16:11 The LORD spoke to Moses and said,
16:12 "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.'"
16:13 In the evening quails came up and covered the camp;
and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp.
16:14 When the layer of dew lifted,
there on the surface of the wilderness
was a fine flaky substance,
as fine as frost on the ground.
16:15 When the Israelites saw it,
they said to one another, "What is it?"
For they did not know what it was.
Moses said to them,
"It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat."

Now let's see the final picture the artist Chris Booth has done to show the end of this episode in the Exodus story.

Frame 4



What's happening here?

Is God present? (Yes)

Is there plenty of food as God promised? (Yes)

Are there people gathering food? (Yes)

Are there still people complaining (Yes!)

Who thought this might happen? – that even when the people are fed by God, they STILL find things to complain about.

Would that happen today?

Praying

Let's go back through the picture frames and let them help us pray.

Frame 1

We pray for those who are in hard places with a lack of resources.

May they know God is present and listening to their cries.

Frame 2

We pray for protesters and complainers – those who raise their voices against wrongs in the world.

May their voice be heard; may their words be made wisely, may justice come peacefully.

Frame 3

We pray for those who are dependent on vulnerable food sources. May food and nourishment for all be protected among other competing agendas.

Frame 4

We confess that we are very blessed complainers. That we have good things from

you God, and yet we are restless and want for more. Forgive us, and show us the way to grace and peace.
Amen

Responding

Provide A6 cards with bbq skewer stuck to the back to make a protest placard, or an A5 card with a fairy-floss stick (available in bulk at craft stores) and invite your gathering to write 'protest prayers'.



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