

It must have seemed to them that God decided God would send this rag tag bunch of people on a venture without end. The paths had not been trodden and the perils were unknown; they could not trust that God was present there; they felt alone. Perhaps they were in need of faith, and courage great and good to go where none had gone before (perhaps where no one should??) God's hand, of course, was leading them. God's love gave them support; this loving Abba God was both their first and last resort.

"Forty years" is Biblical, but so are forty days: Noah's flood and Moses' Sinai stay are but two ways these forty days appear; a third is Jesus' wilderness--temptation by the devil, his vocation to assess. Would he succumb to hunger, or give in to worldly power? Or go for the sensational and jump down from that tower? Or would he skip the devil's short cuts, count them all as loss, trusting still God's loving plan, though that would mean the cross? We know, of course, the outcome of this messianic test; He chose the way of love, forgiveness, justice and the rest.

Now we are all recipients of Christ's transforming grace; that's part of what keeps bringing us back up here to this place, to contemplate our world, our lives, our insecurity, deciding whether we've the stuff we need for living free. How good are we at sorting what we want from what we need? We have what we call freedom, but it sometimes masks our greed. Security is fragile, with a hungry world to feed. God help us in our time and place to follow where you lead.

Perhaps we're the Egyptians, and the world is still enslaved, and it's not always clear from what or for what we've been saved. And so we long once more to hear the grace and mercy word, which in a world of strife and selfishness must sound absurd. The poor still need to hear good news, and have a share of bread. The world still has its captives and oppressed who live in dread; recovery of sight for blind, and those who will not see. Are we too on the list of those who need to be set free?

The manna is abundant; it needs only to be shared. God's promises are still unfolding, need to be declared. The universe is fragile, broken, needing to be mended, that it might more approximate the world that God intended.

Enthuse us, Lord, and energize us for this holy task. Your hand to lead, your love's support--these things are all we ask. Make us your manna people; let us all your mercy share. Touch the world through us with your compassion and your care.

Thank God for Holden Village, and for all who've come and served, and all the blessings we've received, far more than we deserved. Forty years of proclamation, sacraments of grace, and all the hearts that have been touched and healed here in this place. Continu'ly remind us, Lord, we're not up here to hide, but rather to be blest that we might bless the world outside. Forty years! A long, long time our faith life to explore. But I think it's not long enough. Let's go for forty more.

--Paul K. Hanson, Summer, 2002