

## PLENTY

“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...”

--Exodus 16:4

“STARFISH!!!” the cry echoed down Rehoboth Beach. We’d been down there for at least 10 years, all summer long. The only starfish we’d ever encountered were sold wrapped in cellophane, \$2.00/per at the Sea Shell Shop. Yet suddenly here they were, poured in great numbers onto the sand, victims of a rare tide that disgorged them from the deep. Starfish aplenty, starfish galore. Toddlers toddled down to the shoreline with buckets. Those of us slightly older than toddlers also toddled down with our buckets, scooping up this incredible bounty of beautiful sea creatures. How many starfish were too many? None of us was prepared to say. We just kept scooping until our buckets were over-full.

Now what?

Dying/dead starfish...how shall I put this delicately? Stink. So out to the back porch they went. The tiny Delaware shore town in which we lived has a rather large population of roaming cats. Can you picture the scene?

Yup. Dismembered starfish, munched and crunched by said cats. Everywhere.

We took so much more than we needed. The end result? Rot, and loss.

I am a cook possessed. When I encounter a certain ingredient, preferably one that is in short supply, I corner the market. On a mission trip to Costa Rica, I discovered Salsa Lizano, to me the ultimate condiment: a cross between Worcestershire sauce and Tabasco. Then, last year, I discovered lavender, which McCormick’s Spices, happily, bottled and carried in supermarkets. True to form, I bought (no joke) a CASE of Salsa Lizano and an equal amount of culinary lavender. Well, guess what? I actually don’t want to use Salsa Lizano at every meal, so the dusty bottles still line my pantry shelf, largely untouched. McCormick’s stopped carrying lavender recently, and I still probably have enough to perfume baguettes and butter through my lifetime.

And I can’t forget my wild and crazy spending spree prior to Y2K. Never mind that experiencing the end of the world might actually be preferable to eating a gazillion cans of sliced beets!

The people of Israel hoarded their manna. Maybe God would not provide tomorrow, so they’d better darn tootin’ squirrel some food away. You know, just in case. The manna in the desert story in the Bible is huge. God will provide, if we just let Him. If we don’t second guess, hoard, overstock. Rot and ruin are the end result of not trusting.

Here’s another lesson to be drawn...if we always have too much, how can we enjoy it? Doesn’t dinner taste much better when we’re at least a little bit hungry? What is more satisfying: one new outfit, saved and planned for, or a bulging closetful, rarely or never worn?

I was recently listening to an interview with the amazing Buddhist monk and peace activist Thich Naht Hanh. The conversation got around to Heaven, or Nirvana, and the concept of a place of no pain, no suffering, total happiness all the time. A bottomless trough filled with a thousand flavors of ice cream, so to speak. Thich Naht Hanh said he would not even want a Heaven with no suffering, that sorrow and joy were two sides of the same coin, one meaningless without the experience of the other. That's a pretty revolutionary thought, but you know what? I think I get it. My love for Steve grew from a very lonely and unsettled time in my life, and was all the more precious for the hole in my heart that it filled. In a poignant way, I understood myself as a mother better after my two miscarriages—and appreciated the miracle of a live, healthy baby much, much more.

If we look at happiness as a passing feeling and not our inalienable right to enjoy nonstop, perhaps sadness will lose some of its power to stun us. Life ebbs and flows—much like the tide that carried in all those starfish that magical, long-ago day. And maybe the afterlife does as well. God provides, today, tomorrow, forever. And He has provided us with the capacity for both laughter and tears for a reason.

So may I—may we—learn to trust God a little more each day, and share our “manna” with each other, as we were meant to do, so that there's enough for everyone. May we treasure the many, many moments of joy God sends our way—and value, too, the heartaches that mean our hearts are growing bigger.

Meanwhile, I'll work on developing a killer recipe for Lavender, Lizano and Beet Surprise.