

The Lord is Our Provider (Part 1)

Exodus 16:1-15

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One of the greatest challenges of the year in my role as a preacher is the task of preparing a sermon about stewardship. I hope those who occasionally do pulpit supply work are listening, as you need to hear what I say next. For those who know something about preaching, you can't just come up with a topic and manipulate the scripture to support it. That's something called eisegesis, or creating your own agenda. My job is not to give my opinion about things but rather to preach the Word of God. It is not my word; it is the Word of the Lord. So, to begin doing the work of preparing a sermon with a topic in mind beforehand is very dangerous. The work of preaching is to dig into to what God has to say to us today. Nevertheless, the stewardship committee tasks me with this message. We will begin kicking off our stewardship season next week. However, this week begins a couple of stories from Exodus that remind us of the all-important truth that God provides all things to us. So, this year, we get a two-part sermon series for our stewardship campaign.

Fear. Fear can hold us back from so much in life. Fear of the unknown. Fear of failure. Fear of pain. Our text for today's meditation shows us that Fear is not something only our culture deals with. Fear is often part of common human experience. The Israelites find themselves in a place in-between, a time and place of the unknown as they wander in the wilderness. Some 400 years went by before they were delivered from slavery in Egypt. Today, one might be aware of the intergenerational struggle and the widespread post traumatic stress disorder that might restrict the Israelites in their thoughts and actions. Some of us in this sanctuary have lived entire lives in the comforts of first-world living and never really had to struggle. Others here have faced the realities of economic scarcity. The current hunger of the Israelites mixed with their past pain creates a lack of trust, a lack of faith, and restricts their movement forward into freedom.

The Israelites are collectively complaining to Moses and Aaron in our text. They seem to forget about their condition of slavery and remember being fed. They lament for their present circumstances as they fear starvation and actually ponder the idea that they would prefer God had destroyed them while they had still had food in Egypt. The people struggle to reimagine life from outside of Pharaoh or to understand God's alternative economy. The People of Israel are very vulnerable at this moment. Freedom requires sustainability and human bodies require nourishment. Sometime people would give up freedom from oppression when survival becomes uncertain.

From time to time, we need a reminder that God can handle our complaints. It is okay to complain to God. It's not sinful, especially when the need is truly there. And here, God does not punish the complaints. God tells Moses he will rain bread from heaven for the people—enough bread each day and twice as much on the 6th day so they do not need to gather on the Sabbath.

Moses and Aaron then turn to the Israelites and explain to them that they will remember it was the Lord who led them out of Egypt. Moses then explains that the Lord will provide meat in the evening and bread in the morning as the Lord heard their complaints against him. Moses underscores their complaints are against the Lord, not he and Aaron.

Moses instructs Aaron what to say next. Remember, that Aaron largely acts as the mouthpiece of Moses because of Moses' stuttering problem. Aaron tells the people to draw near to the Lord, for he has heard their complaining. The Israelites looked toward the wilderness and the glory of the Lord appeared in a cloud. The Lord then desires the Israelites live each day, one at a time, trusting in him all the way. The Lord is asking them to live in the present moment. How are we doing with that today? Do we wake up and seek to put our trust in the Lord each day, or, are we distracted by our circumstances? How's our prayer life? How are we doing at living in the moment?

Ultimately, God is reorientating Israel to the reality of interdependent living. They need this especially if they are to have a chance in the promised land. For in the land flowing with milk and honey, one can easily forget that all things come from God. None of us are entirely self-sufficient. We all must rely on others, and especially God. The Israelites will recognize that every meal is participation in God's creative work.

Hopefully we have learned somewhere that God provides everything for us. Imagine if we realized that and practiced accordingly. Imagine if we recognized every meal as a direct gift from God for us. In this text, God's presence emerges precisely where human bodies are hungry and frail. God provides enough to satisfy. It is not luxurious, excessive, but is enough for all. Biblical flourishing is not about acquiring and accumulating endlessly, but rather receiving enough to satisfy. The quail and the manna exemplify God's generosity that contrasts with systems that manufacture scarcity.

The movement of this passage begins with hunger that turns to complaint and lament, next God promises to provide for the need. Then, God's glory appears in the wilderness in the form of a cloud, then gives assurance of food to come. God's provision takes the form of Quail and Manna. Then, it is up to the Israelites to move forward trusting in God to continue providing. We usually translate verse 15 as "What is it?" The Hebrew man hu or manna means what is it. It also can be translated, it is Manna.

When we live in abundance, it is quite difficult to remember that God provides everything for us. We tend to feel very self-sufficient. And, if we think God does not provide for our abundance, we may think of it is very scarce and limited.

What if we took time to look at our home and give thanks for it. Then, what if we take it a step further and look at every item in our homes and consider that God provided for all of that. Imagine that God entrusts us to care for all of that. Now, how much do we trust God.

Now, let's consider how much we trust God. When we consider how we will give of our time, talents, and resources, what is an appropriate gift? Take some time to center and pray about that. What is possible? What is enough? What best reflects how much we trust in our Creator?

Stewardship begins not with fear of scarcity, but with trust in the One who provides. The same God who rained manna in the wilderness still provides enough for today. May our giving, our serving, and our living become a testimony that we trust God more than our fears, and that all we have is not merely ours to possess, but God's gift to steward.