

Philippians 1:27-30

Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing. For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well - since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

Exodus 16:2-15

The whole congregation of 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 the wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

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. On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as gathered on other days." 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, and 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?" 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."

Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, 'Draw near to the Lord, for he has heard your complaining.'" 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. The Lord spoke to Moses and said, "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.'"

In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. 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. 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.

Sermon

The people were wandering through the wilderness, a bit lost and a lot hungry. The original provisions that were hastily gathered in the escape from Egypt had long run out and there were no herds or crops in which to beg, buy or steal along the way. Even after the years of forced labor and grueling conditions in Egypt, in the face of starvation the people began wishing for the fleshpots of slavery, because at least there was food. Was this escape the work of the Lord or was this just an undeveloped plan that got the people across the water, but did not plan on the time in the wilderness? It is hard to look to a distant promise land when our bellies and those of our families are empty. My voice would have called out in complaint with the rest of the people, and I would dare to say that yours would have too.

But the Lord heard, and the Lord provided. The Exodus text is extremely clear about God hearing the voices of the Israelites. At least three times does God react to the voices of frustration. And though it seems like Aaron and Moses may be a bit frustrated with the complaints of the people, questioning their leadership, even questioning God. God's reaction is something different. God hears their complaints, and then reacts to alleviate the suffering.

Think about that for just a moment. What reaction might we have in the face of the peoples protest? When we feel like someone is ungrateful, or hostile toward us, or questioning our authority? When a group of people seem to be protesting and angry and mad about the conditions in which they find themselves. It may not seem to you that you have caused this pain and suffering that these others are feeling, but the anger and frustration seems, in some ways, to be pointed toward you. Moses and Aaron try to put the people in their place, "You aren't complaining about us, but about God - and who are you to complain about God?" But what does God do? He hears their complaint and the Lord provides.

The Lord promises meat in the evening, and the people are amazed and thankful as a flock of quail fly into the camp. The Lord promises bread in the morning, and the people are perplexed as they dew and fog raises up, leaving behind some kind of flaky stuff. The people look at the ground and begin to wander out load, "What is it?" Or in Hebrew, "Manna?" Yes, the word that goes on to mean special bread, literally means, "What is it?" Can you imagine for a moment going up to your favorite cafe, "Uh, I would like a large mocha latte and a slice of What is It please."

But the people did not recognize this flaky substance, they didn't know what it was or even what to do with it. Yet here was the promised bread rained down. Here was the providential care of the Lord who brought them out of Egypt. Here is God's response to the complaining of the people. No hate or rejection or anger in response, but Manna, but what is it?

Scientists have conjectured what the flaky substance might have been, but no one is quite clear. Was it a flower or a fungus, we don't know. But what we do know is that it was enough, enough for that day at least.

And that is also a reminder about God's care. The Lord provides does not mean that the Lord makes things easy or piles on abundance of food or riches or things. Believing that the Lord provides doesn't mean that the Lord pulls our strings and makes us or our neighbors righteous. God's promise to the people was that the Lord would provide bread in the morning and meat at twilight. Enough for today. Enough for you, but not just you - enough for all of the people.

What would happen if we started living our lives with the perspective of enough for today? What would happen if we realized that God has provided enough for all people today, if only we were open to sharing and caring for one another? What would happen if we realized that if God provides enough for today, we can rely on God providing enough for tomorrow - tomorrow?

What would happen if we reacted less like Moses and Aaron and more like God. Instead of getting angry and frustrated with complaints and protests, maybe we could find a way to listen to our brothers and sisters who are hungry and to provide daily manna. Some things are evident in the story of Exodus and in our culture today. Doing what is right is seldom doing what is easy and it doesn't always come with honor or glory. But if we are to follow the God who brought Israel out of Egypt, then we must live our life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. We must listen and seek to provide for all of God's children. We must be willing to put down our privileges and our striving for an abundance of things, and take up our faith that God's faithfulness should lead to our faithfulness. Enough for today's journey, today calling. Enough to share with those who are in need today, enough to feed ourselves. Thanks be to God for daily bread, help us to recognize it when we see it. Amen