

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church  
 God Provides Manna  
 The Lord hears our grumbling and provides for our needs.  
 Scripture: Exodus 16:1-18  
 Rev. Steve Filyk  
 Thanksgiving  
 October 10, 2021  
 Opening Hymn: Come thou fount  
 Chorus: how deep the Father's love for us, Cornerstone  
 Closing Hymn: Be Thou my Vision

Are you fearful about the future?

A survey done in 2019 showed that  
 "almost three out of four Canadians  
 [were] concerned about their future  
 and the future of their families...

Just six percent reported feeling optimistic  
 while 22 per cent... somewhat optimistic."<sup>i</sup>

We could brainstorm a quick list of why so many of us are fearful.  
 You might include:  
 COVID-19, changing social values,  
 international terrorism, a high cost of living,  
 climate change.

But did you know that most of us  
 Are living better than any other generation  
 Before us?

The article entitled "3 Reasons You Are Wrong About 'The Good Old Days'"  
 Notes that "the world has seen dramatic improvements  
 over the last couple centuries,

including better access to healthcare, less malnutrition,  
 less violence, less war, less pollution,  
 more education equality, more human rights,  
 more democracy, and more freedom."<sup>ii</sup>

You may want to argue with this  
 but just consider these statistics:

"Life expectancy has more than doubled in the last 150 years  
 to 71 years old after staying stagnant  
 at around 30 for thousands of years.  
 [Imagine being only 40 and being considered an 'old man'!]

Child mortality has plummeted in the last 200 years  
 to about 4% of kids dying before 5 years old,  
 down from over 40% in 1820.  
 [Imagine that 4 out of 10 of us never surviving to our teenage years.]

Illiteracy has plunged to 14% today, down from 88% in 1800  
 [Imagine not being able to read the newspaper, or your favorite book.]

Extreme poverty has dropped to about 10% today,  
 down from close to 90% in 1820..."<sup>iii</sup>  
 [Imagine having empty cupboards.]

Life is getting better.  
 Yet so many of us are afraid,  
 Full of fear about the future.

Of course we aren't the first generation to be like this.  
 We see the same behavior in today's Bible lesson.

Today we encounter the people of Israel  
 Free from their bondage of Egypt.

After a showdown between God and Pharaoh,  
 A showdown where God displays God's mighty power,  
 The people are liberated, set free.

When Pharaoh's army goes after them,  
 The people again observe God's power  
 As Pharaoh's army is drown in the sea.

But today when we meet them in the desert  
 This liberated nation is fearful and complaining.  
 Earlier they had run out of water,  
 And again, God provided for them.

But now they have run out of food,  
 And they are worried that they will starve.

They complain to Moses:  
 "If only we had died by the LORD's hand in Egypt!

There we sat around pots of meat  
 and ate all the food we wanted,  
 but you have brought us out into this desert  
 to starve this entire assembly to death."<sup>iv</sup>

Now on one hand we can sympathise with them.  
 The people of Israel at this point were city-folk.  
 They had lived in advanced society,  
 and were doing their first wilderness camp-out.

But while the Nile river may sparkle in their memories  
 They are quick to forget that their babies  
 Had floated dead in those waters.

While the smells of Egyptian bakeries  
 may still linger in their nostrils  
 They are forgetful that making bricks in the hot sun  
 Had left them too exhausted  
 to raise their hands to their mouths.<sup>v</sup>

In a moment of fear the people were convincing themselves  
 That things were much better before.  
 And they grumble to God.

But despite this ingratitude  
 God is patient with them.

The God who liberated them from Egypt  
 Will provide for them in the desert  
 Even as they wait to enter the Promised Land.

God provides them meat  
 by sending them quail.  
 God provides them bread in the form of manna  
 Which covers the ground.

According to commentators these gifts  
 Would seem to be quite common  
 In the area where the people found themselves.

The Bible's description of manna  
 "corresponds quite closely to a natural phenomenon  
 in the Sinai Peninsula.

A type of plant lice punctures the fruit of the tamarisk tree  
 and excretes a substance from this juice,  
 a yellowish-white flake or ball.

During the warmth of the day it disintegrates,  
 but it congeals when it is cold...

Rich in carbohydrates and sugar,  
 it is still gathered by natives,  
 who bake it into a kind of bread (and call it manna)...

[As for the quail],  
 migratory birds flying in from Africa  
 or blown in from the Mediterranean  
 [are often found in this area]

often exhausted enough to be caught by hand."<sup>vi</sup>

Now when I was a child and heard the story  
 of manna and quail in the desert  
 I thought that God had showered the people  
 With loaves of cut-up "Wonderbread".  
 Like those small pieces we'd be given at communion.

But for those who knew the land and that desert  
 It is very possible, even likely  
 That God's provision was more mundane than miraculous.

Does this devalue the gift?  
 I don't think so.  
 Neither does Moses.

Moses quite correctly tells the people:  
 "[This] is the bread the Lord has given you to eat."<sup>vii</sup>

You see whether it was a miracle  
 or an ordinary gift of nature  
 It all comes from the hand of God.

The Bible tells us that those people subsisted  
 On these provision for a very long time.  
 You can imagine they learned to be creative  
 In preparing the manna and quail.

To steal a page from Forrest Gump:  
 "You can barbecue it, boil it, broil it, bake it, sauté it.  
 There's quail-kabobs, quail creole, quail gumbo.  
 [quail that is] Pan fried, deep fried, stir-fried."<sup>viii</sup>

Even with these gifts, desert life wouldn't be easy.  
 It wasn't that Promised Land of milk and honey.  
 And yet it was truly better than the bondage  
 They had experience in Egypt.

In the desert they would learn  
 about God's daily, ongoing provision.

So are you fearful about the future?  
 Could it be that like Israel  
 you have been glorifying a broken past?  
 Could it be that you are overlooking  
 How God is providing for your everyday needs?

God has certainly been good to us.  
 Every single one of you WALKED into this sanctuary.  
 No-one was pushed in, in a wheelchair.

I have no doubt that you all had a good breakfast.  
 If you didn't you have only yourself to blame.  
 And if you came here under a dark cloud  
 Today's story provides a rebuke and a reminder.

God continues to be faithful to us.  
 So let's be thankful  
 And celebrate God's goodness today. Amen.

<sup>i</sup> International, Radio Canada. "Great majority of Canadians anxious about future: poll – RCI | English." RCI | English, 3 July 2019, [www.rcinet.ca/en/2019/07/01/great-majority-of-canadians-anxious-about-future-poll](http://www.rcinet.ca/en/2019/07/01/great-majority-of-canadians-anxious-about-future-poll).

<sup>ii</sup> Vinny, Cee. "3 Reasons You Are Wrong About 'The Good Old Days' - Ascent Publication." Medium, 8 Mar. 2019, [medium.com/the-ascent/3-reasons-you-are-wrong-about-the-good-old-days-e868973f37a9](https://medium.com/the-ascent/3-reasons-you-are-wrong-about-the-good-old-days-e868973f37a9).

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid

<sup>iv</sup> Exodus 16:3

<sup>v</sup> Imagery from Scott Hoezee "Exodus 16:2-15" *The Lectionary Commentary: the Old Testament and Acts* 92

<sup>vi</sup> Terence E. Fretheim *Exodus* 182

<sup>vii</sup> Exodus 16:15 NIV

<sup>viii</sup> "Forrest Gump (1994) - IMDb." IMDb, 8 Oct. 2021, [www.imdb.com/title/tt0109830/characters/nm0932112](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0109830/characters/nm0932112).