

Sunday September 3, 2023  
Lesson 1: Who Is This God?  
Scripture: Exodus 16: 2-19, 31-32

**Context:**

Today we start our fall curriculum, “God Provides.” As the name suggests, we will be looking at the story of God where throughout scripture God gives to the people of God what they need. The first unit is titled “Food,” where we will have several lessons of how God’s providence is in the physical refreshments we receive. Today’s lesson comes from the book of Exodus where God reminds the people of how God will always provide. The focus of today’s lesson will be to discover how God’s provision deepens our faith and draws us closer to one another.

The lesson is set in the book of Exodus, named for the journey the newly freed Hebrews (Israelites) take from Egypt to the Promised Land. Before we dive into the text, it is important to note the Israelites have forgotten God, both in name and what God has promised their ancestors. As Exodus one notes, when Joseph died and a new Pharaoh arose, some of the cultural and religious values shifted as certain individuals no longer passed on the narrative or tradition. The Israelites do not know what God can do and are thus in the infancy stages of the faith as they leave the land of Egypt after a battle royale between God and Pharaoh.

Chapter sixteen opens with what will become a very common theme in the rest of Exodus: the Israelites are complaining and grumbling about everything. This congregation of God has not realized in their new identity how God will not abandon them. They wish they had stayed in Egypt preferring to die, satiety with oppression as opposed to starvation with freedom.<sup>1</sup> As the people grow angry and accuse Moses and Aaron of leading them to the desert to die, God intervenes and provides for them without a negative or back-biting word.

The two gifts given to the people are ordinary items which will feed them repeatedly. The first is manna, which 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.<sup>2</sup> Just as God says in the text, during the day it disintegrates and quickly decays; whereas in the early morning it is congealed.<sup>3</sup> The second gift is quail, a type of bird which has migratory patterns in the Mediterranean.

The experience starts out as a crisis and is turned into part of the faith narrative. Towards the end, we have God commanding Moses to keep some of the manna for worship. God’s provision is to be remembered as the experience of God’s giving of daily bread pairs with the

---

<sup>1</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, “Exodus.” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2010), 181.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

community's worship.<sup>4</sup> There is a tie to the goodness of God and faith over fear.

### **Application**

Grumble, grumble, grumble. I once had a colleague share a sermon where she analyzed one of the many times the Israelites complained and used this as a dominating theme throughout the sermon. It was genius as this is what the Israelites did as well as folks a little closer to home: us! This seems to be a common theme at the center of the people of God. We are good at grumbling and complaining.

In recent years, I have heard a lot of grumbling from all sorts of corners. I think of our world where countries fight with each other over who has land access to certain resources. I think of our country where the division runs so rampant, every group "grumbles" when their elected official doesn't win and there's an ongoing complaining about the state of the country. I get on social media and see groups who complain and grumble about what other people have done, and then talk about the lack of care and support, nursing hurts which go back decades. There are people who love to do nothing but grumble and complain, almost making it an Olympic sport.

I wish the church was immune and alas we are not. We do our fair share of grumbling about the world and complaining about God's lack of presence in this or that area. All of us are guilty of it and all of us can fall prey to believing God has turned God's back on us.

Yet in today's narrative and the focus, we hear God is not some violent, disgruntled provider who feels slapped. Instead, God points out to Moses and the Israelites of how God will provide for them, and they are fed in this journey. And just as God promises, the people receive different forms of food to make them whole.

In many ways, it is a beautiful form of community God makes in the text today. This "congregation" certainly still has their issues and we will discover their grumbling will continue. Yet for today's lesson we see how God does this act to help them grow in their faith and to also connect them to one another as a body. As they look at what is in front of them, God will show them both the physical and emotional nourishment they will be given.

A few months ago, while on a worship retreat to plan worship for my charge, I was simultaneously reading a book recommended by a mentor called *Generation to Generation* by Edwin Friedman. The book asserts how in healthy systems, whether in a church or a synagogue or other religious body, there will be times when the system deals with unhealthy individuals who do not do self-reflection as they sabotage both leaders and the rest of the system. They will do so with whatever tools available whether it is withdrawing, triangulating, or as you can probably guess, complaining. These individuals are not bad people; instead, they are not paying attention to the other parts of the healthy system.

What I found interesting in Friedman's analysis is how the systems which thrive under pressure are two-fold: one is the leader is self-differentiated and does not cave to the complaining parts of the system. The second part is how other parts of the system which are healthy respond with thanksgiving and attention to their own spiritual and emotional development. As a result, both the leader and the rest of the system grow together, and they can

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 187.

move forward as a body not allowing the other parts of the system to derail them from common focuses and goals.

As a people of faith this translates to all of us realizing how God has provided so much for us already. We have food on the table, resources both present and waiting to be discovered, and hopefully spiritual communities where we are loved and valued. We should be able to look around and see all the wonderful things the Lord is doing in our midst instead of dwelling on what we do not possess, the days of old, or even the perceived wrongs of others. When we celebrate what God has already given us, we grow in faith, and we grow in our relationships with each other. We can see how God has fed us before and God will feed us again. God will provide.

Why do you think grumbling is such an easy trap to fall into? How do you give thanksgiving to God for all God has given you? When has God's provision deepened your faith? What is an example of an experience of faith connecting you more firmly to others? How can you look for the Lord's providence around you in distressing seasons?

Rev. Dr. E. Hunter Pugh  
Pastor of Brantley – Brunson Chapel Charge  
PO Box 71  
Brantley, AL 36009