

NEW VISION UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
1600 Mangrove Avenue, Suite 177
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11:00 -- Sunday Celebration Worship

“Enough Is Enough”

November 22, 2015
Thanksgiving Sunday

Preached by: Jim Peck, Pastor

Scripture Readings: Exodus 16: 1 - 36; Proverbs 30: 7 - 9

Will you pray with me? Illuminating God, as we open your Word this morning, help us to understand how it speaks to us for the living of these days. Amen.

Some years ago, the Rubbermaid Corporation ran a clever advertisement for their plastic storage bins. A perfect American family was lamenting they had too much stuff, that their stuff was out of control, that their stuff was taking over their lives. We saw video footage of all their stuff, everywhere in the house, taking over their lives.

Then mom gets an idea: we'll buy Rubbermaid storage bins and get our stuff under control. Off they go to their local Rubbermaid retailer. Back they come loaded with storage bins. Diligently and gently, all the stuff is stored! Their house is set free from piles of unstored stuff! They gather in the living room and celebrate with exceeding joy! Happy, happy family!

Then dad looks around and says: “We need more stuff!” And they cheer, and rush out of the house together.

A perfect American family indeed. Complaining about having too much and complaining about not having enough.

All human beings consume - food, water, energy. And, in my experience, all human beings want something in their lives that lifts them up, gives them a sense of worth and value.

A friend of mine in Denver tells how her great-grandparents crossed the plains in the 1870s to homestead in Colorado. Her great-grandmother insisted they take the pump organ on the wagon. Her great-grandfather thought it was a foolish waste of space, but mama insisted and so papa made room. Every night when the caravan stopped, mama would play the organ and bring music to the company of travelers.

One night, while she was playing, a band of Indians arrived and, of course, it frightened the white people. But mama kept on playing and after a while, the Indians left. When the sun rose, the white people found a basket of berries at the edge, a thank you gift from the locals.

And papa told mama bringing that organ was the best idea she'd ever had. My friend closes the story by saying the organ is still in the family.

Our problem with consuming is that we don't always know when enough is enough. It's true for all of us. I have no special insights. We usually only know we've got enough right after we've realized we have too much.

I don't do much recreational shopping, but when I do, a bookstore is my preferred place to wander. Well, bookstores, big box home improvement stores, and office supply stores. But that's it! Except for museum stores. I like those too.

Ministers live on books, and I like a good mystery as much as I like a good Bible commentary, so bookstores are bad, bad places for me. Although my personal library has over 1700 items, I believe I do not have enough books. It is not my fault they keep writing new ones! Bad, bad writers, ruining my life like that! Only, you know, I'm the one who has to say no to another book, or two, or, oh, what's wrong with seven or eight at one time?

Now the whole congregation of the Israelites had something they had never had before: freedom from slavery. Yet, about six weeks out from Egypt, they are complaining and they are complaining about the food. It's not clear what they had been eating, probably unleavened bread and what they could find foraging in the desert.

These were town folk for the most part, not farmers, and probably didn't know the land all that well. And they begin to long for the old days. They tell their leaders, Moses and Aaron, they would have rather died in slavery in Egypt than be free and hungry.

If you were desperate, what would you trade for a good meal?

Moses takes the issue to God. During this journey from the known land of slavery to the promised land of freedom, Moses goes to God on a regular basis and says: "How are you going to keep your promise now?" That's a perfectly legitimate thing to say to God, by the way. How are you going to keep your promise now?

God says: "I am going to rain bread from heaven every morning. I am going to send quails every evening. Bread in the morning. Meat in the evening. Every morning you should gather enough just for that day. On the sixth day, you can gather enough for two days. But anything you hoard will rot. Please do as I instruct. There is enough, but there is not too much. You must believe me when I say there is enough."

God is revealing to us that God is a provider. Providence is not just the capital of Rhode Island. Providence is the affirmation that God provides all we need, and all we need is provided by God. Providing is one of the things God does for us.

So when the morning came, there was a fine flaky substance on the ground and they looked at it and said "What is it?" which in Hebrew is "man hu" and so they called it manna. It was pleasant to eat, like wafers made with honey, and they could cook with it, and I have no doubt someone became famous for quail with manna sauce.

As wonderful as this story is, and as miraculous as it is, manna is real. Manna is the dried sap of certain desert plants, sap that excretes during the cool desert nights, falls to the ground, and melts in the heat of the day. We believe the Israelites were eating the sap of tamarisk trees.

Manna is real. In several parts of the Mediterranean, manna is made from the sap of flowering ash trees. Manna is also collected in the wild areas. Here are two kinds of manna from Iran. Manna was free to the Israelites, not so free for modern-day cooks. One form of manna is \$28 per ounce. The other is \$18 per ounce. (A powerpoint display was shown.)

Paul Liebrandt, a chef in New York City, has used manna. He says, "The texture is unlike any other I've experienced - chewy and crunchy at the same time. No two people taste manna the same way. Some taste a haunting minty-ness, others detect a whiff of lemon. No other ingredient is quite like that." (New York Times, June 8, 2010.)

The desert plants that exuded manna for the ancient Israelites had been doing there exuding for centuries, long before the Israelites came along. And the quails had been showing up in the evening for some time too.

I never want to diminish the Providence of God. But I do want to remember that paying attention to what God is providing all the time is essential to seeing that there is enough, not just for ourselves, enough for everyone, if we but see these gifts are for everyone, not just ourselves.

This prayer from Proverbs is the prayer for giving thanks: "God, give me neither poverty nor riches. Feed me with the food I need, not more, lest I shall be full and deny you and claim I have done all this myself, and not too little, lest I shall be hungry and steal and bring shame to the name of my God."

Now there is another aspect of manna. Everyone I know has a food that is manna to them, something that, when they eat it, it makes them feel the Providence of God. Something that gives joy and comfort and a sense of well-being. I have some nominations.

(Powerpoint display showing various foods: macaroni and cheese, strawberries, avocados, cherries, rice, ending with grits.)

In fact, as I was finishing this message, I developing a hankering for some manna myself (show grits) which for a Southern boy like me is a nice bowl of grits with butter and cheese and crumbled up bacon. Grits have no nutritional value whatsoever, buy, my oh my, they are a blessing. They are evidence of the Providence of God!

The Israelites complained because they didn't know how to look for the gifts God was giving them in unfamiliar territory. God told them to look carefully all around them, in both the morning and the evening. They did and when they did, they said "God is keeping the promise."

This week, as we observe Thanksgiving, the great holiday our spiritual ancestors the Pilgrims invented, look around for the gifts God is giving. Even if the territory is familiar, you might see them afresh, with new vision. You might see the best gifts are not stuff at all.

And you will see you have enough.

Amen.

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