

Exodus 16:1-15 ²The entire Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. ³The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the LORD’s hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat around pots of meat and ate as much food as we wanted, but now you have brought us out into this wilderness to have this whole community die of hunger.” ⁴Then the LORD said to Moses, “Watch what I will do. I will rain down bread from heaven for you, and the people will go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test whether they will follow my instructions or not. ⁵On the sixth day they will prepare what they bring in, and it will be twice as much as they gather on the other days.” ⁶So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “At evening you will know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, ⁷and in the morning you will see the Glory of the LORD, because he has heard your constant grumbling against the LORD. Who are we that you should grumble against us?”

God asked him to do the unthinkable. One day he directly told Abraham to go out to a mountain he would show to him and then sacrifice his only son, Isaac. God is very clear throughout the Bible that he hates when people practice human sacrifice which sadly became somewhat common. Not only did God seem to be doing a complete 180, but Isaac was the son through whom God’s promise of the Savior was going to come. It didn’t make any sense.

But we read in Genesis 22, “Abraham got up early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, along with Isaac his son. Abraham split the wood for the burnt offering. Then he set out to go to the place that God had told him about.” God said and Abraham did even though it didn’t make sense to us. In Hebrews 11 we read, “He reasoned that God also had the ability to raise him from the dead” so he had confidence even if God had him do that unthinkable thing.

We know the rest of the story. God provided a ram for the sacrifice in place of Isaac. “Abraham called the name of that place ‘The LORD Will Provide.’ So it is said to this day, ‘On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.’” I can’t tell you how many times I’ve quoted that passage and every single time it’s been true. This text for today is another classic example. The LORD Provides despite our sin, he provides for the sake of his Name, and he provides just what we need.

In Exodus chapter 14 we hear the end of, well, the Exodus. God had sent the 10 plagues against the Egyptians. The last one gave Pharaoh no choice but to let the Israelites go. Not long after that he changed his mind and pursued them with his entire army. God allowed the people to cross the Red Sea on dry land. When the Egyptians tried to follow the waves crashed back over them and wiped them out.

In chapter 15 we hear the songs that Moses and his sister Miriam sang to praise the LORD for delivering his people. In this chapter we are about a month after they left Egypt. They had not yet arrived to Mount Sinai to receive God’s old covenant from him. God made a promise to them, “I am the LORD, who heals you.” They could trust in him for their entire journey. This was a test from God to see if they would actually trust in him.

Well, it didn’t take very long before that trust was shaken. They got to a place that was pretty barren and dry. By this time it is very likely that the provisions they brought with them had run out. Very little would grow, certainly not enough to support a nation of around two million people. What would they do? Would they remember what God had done for them already or would they complain?

Guess which option they chose. It was the same option that they picked throughout their journey to the Promised Land. They said, “If only we had died by the LORD’s hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat around pots of meat and ate as much food as we wanted, but now you have brought us out into this wilderness to have this whole community die of hunger.”

It’s amazing how quickly they forgot how they had cried out to the LORD to rescue them from their slavery. They were acting as if this was all an elaborate trick to lure them out into the wilderness to kill them. That didn’t make any sense at all. If God really wanted them all gone, it would have been much easier to have the Egyptians do it for him. They complained against Moses and Aaron, their leaders, but they were really complaining against God himself as if he couldn’t possibly provide for them.

When we read through the book of Exodus, most of the time the people of Israel are a negative example for us. In other words, look at what they did and do the opposite. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “Now these things took place as examples to warn us not to desire evil things the way they did...they were written down to warn us, to whom the end of the ages has come.”

The simple fact is that we haven’t learned our lesson. When we see what they did, it’s kind of like looking in a mirror. We complain at least as much and we are far less to complain about. We gripe about our political leaders and act as if not even God can save us from the “wrong” candidate. We complain about our

bosses, accusing them of being more concerned with their bonuses than the people who work for them. Children whine that all of their problems must be their parents' fault.

Remember who we are really attacking. Just like the Israelites weren't really attacking Moses and Aaron, we aren't attacking these earthly leaders. We are attacking God because they are his representatives. He placed them over us. The fourth commandment demands that we honor, serve, and obey them. We are acting as if God's power is so limited that he cannot possibly save us from sinful human beings. It didn't make sense at the Exodus and it doesn't make sense today.

The LORD Provides despite our sin and he provides for the sake of his Name.

Moses and Aaron told the people, **"At evening you will know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, ⁷and in the morning you will see the Glory of the LORD, because he has heard your constant grumbling against the LORD. Who are we that you should grumble against us?"** This is the very first time in the Scriptures that the glory of the LORD appears to people, but it wouldn't be the last.

It was a visible sign of God's presence with his people. Often it would appear as a bright shining cloud. When they finally got to Mount Sinai, the glory of the LORD made it look like the top of the mountain was engulfed in flames. There were also trumpet blasts and earthquakes shaking everything. That glory descended on the Temple when King Solomon dedicated it. That same glory appeared with the angels when they announced the birth of the Savior to the shepherds.

God didn't do this to make people go "ooh" and "aah" as if they were watching a fireworks display. He wanted to show them in a very dramatic way that he is perfect and holy and they are not. Without his covenant and the blood of the Savior, no one would have any right to come before him. It also was visible proof that he had more than enough power to provide for them.

Once again, remember what the name "the LORD" means. It is the single most important name you ever have or ever will hear. It shows him as the God who is faithful to his promises no matter what. He is the God who has single-minded devotion to the world—to provide salvation for every human being who cannot get it any other way. His burning zeal was going to make sure it happens.

Many years earlier, God had made a promise to Abraham that he would make him into a great nation. That was a big thing for someone who would be 100 before his first child would be born. Through him and through his family, all the nations of the earth would be blessed. The fact that God is leading Israel out of Egypt and bringing them to the land he promised to Abraham showed that God was keeping his word.

God had an even older promise that he was working on too. All the way back in the Garden of Eden, right after the first sin had been committed, God said that he was going to provide a Savior for the whole world. He would be one of Adam and Eve's descendants. He would reverse the damage that their sin had inflicted on the world. He would open up heaven, not just for Adam and Eve, not just for the Israelites, but for every human being who ever had or ever will live.

Now, I seriously doubt that any of us will ever see the glory of the LORD with our own eyes. Realistically, we don't need to. We can see it with the eyes of faith whenever we read sections of Scripture like this one. Every page of the Bible, from beginning to end, is a testament to the glory of the LORD. We've seen it indirectly in our own lives. There are so many things that show God's zeal to save us too.

We see it whenever there is a baptism at church. We hear it whenever God's Word is read. We taste it when we receive our Savior's own body and blood in Holy Communion. God is at work in power through all of those means of grace. He uses them to bring us to faith, to sustain us in the faith, and to equip us to live our faith. So while it might not be as impressive as seeing the top of a mountain on fire, it is every bit as powerful.

The LORD Provides for the sake of his Name and finally he provides just what we need.

Israel's immediate problem was clear. They had two million mouths that needed to be fed. They weren't staying in any one place very long, certainly not long enough to plant crops and have them grow until harvest. Even if they would stay that long, they were not in a place where it would be likely for anything to grow. This is another one of those situations where God gave them no choice but to trust in him.

So God provided for them in two ways. First he provided them with quail to eat. It wasn't too unusual for flocks of quail to fly in and be so exhausted that they could be caught by hand. The difference here is that the quail came at precisely the time when God said it would. Not only that but there was more than enough to feed two million people. That's a lot of quail. Just like we saw in the Gospel lesson for today—when God blesses us, he isn't stingy.

The other way God provided for them is even more amazing. The next day when the dew evaporated there was something that looked like frost on the ground. The Israelites called it manna which sounds like the

Hebrew word for “What is it?” It could be prepared in a number of different ways. It appeared every day (except on the Sabbath) until they finally entered the Promised Land around forty years later.

God takes care of us each and every day too, just not the way that he did in this text. I’m guessing that you didn’t go out into your front yard to gather what you needed to eat for that day. But God has enabled us to work and earn a living so that we can provide for ourselves. Or you are living on a pension or social security that you worked hard for. Some of you are farmers who grew what you eat yourselves. The rest of us can go to the store and enjoy the bounty that the farmers have provided for us.

My best friend was assigned from the Seminary to be a missionary to Novosibirsk, Russia. He mentioned how happy they were when their grocery store finally got peanut butter in stock again. The store in town here might occasionally not have the brand and style you want, but you can choose from a wide variety of brands and styles. That’s just one example of how generous God is with us.

In the second lesson for today, the Apostle Paul has been talking about gathering an offering for the believers around Jerusalem who were suffering from a famine. He reminded them that **“God is able to make all grace overflow to you, so that in all things, at all times, having all that you need, you will overflow in every good work”** and God **“will increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way.”**

As important as it is for us to be able to eat, have clothes to wear, and so on, none of those things have any lasting value. We needed God to do something more for us and he has. He has showered us with his grace by choosing us before the creation of the world. He gave us his one and only Son to be our Savior thousands of years before we would even know about him. He claimed us as his own through Holy Baptism.

God made sure that his Word would be recorded and preserved for us so that we can read his own message to us translated into a language we can clearly understand. He assures us that there is more than enough forgiveness for any sin we might ever commit. He promises that he is with us each and every step of the way through this life. He tells us that even the very worst things in life have to work for our good because he will see to it personally. He keeps our eyes on the goal—eternal life with him in heaven.

The LORD Provides despite our sin, he provides for the sake of his Name, and he provides just what we need. I doubt that we will ever have to face situations like the Israelites did in this text or like Abraham did in Genesis 22, but we will have our fair share of challenges in life. I don’t know what the future holds, but I know we can go forward in confidence, trusting that the LORD provides, just like he promised.