

Glory Days

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One interesting thing about growing older, you young people will learn this eventually, is how much time gets spent looking backwards. We look back on “The good old days” as we call them. We have songs about them even. Think about Brian Adams’ song, “Summer of ‘69” or Bruce Springsteen’s song, “Glory Days.” Both songs are written about the past. Both songs highlight the good times of the past. I even saw a meme on Facebook the other day that said something to the effect, “I wish there was a way to know that you’re in the good old days before you actually left them.” It’s like we are all obsessed with the past, as though these days now are not good days at all. As if somehow the old days were better.

There is nothing wrong with remembering the good times we had in the past. It is fun to reminisce about the time “Uncle Bob” went fishing and fell in the lake. Or the good times we had crawfishing in the creeks at Allegany. Or playing Pinochle with family. Or whatever. But it is important for us to remember that God used those so-called, “good old days” to get us to where we are today. God taught us lessons in those days that have helped us to be who we are today. God led us and provided for us so that we could serve Him better today.

Think about how many times Israel was reminded about how God led them out of their slavery in Egypt through the wilderness and into the promised land. Think about how many times Paul reminded the churches of all the good that God had done for them. Think about how every service here we celebrate the Eucharist to remind us of all that Christ has done for us. It is okay to remember the past, so long as it encourages us to continue on in the faith, and does not cause us to complain about the present or hinder us from trusting in God and serving God in the present.

That seems to me to have been a lesson that the Israelites from our first reading needed to learn, among other lessons as well. In Exodus 16, having recently been freed from their slavery in Egypt in chapter 12, and saved from Pharaoh’s chariots in chapter 14, we find them in the wilderness. In fact, we find them grumbling. Why? Because they are hungry.

Now this is not the first time that the people grumbled. In Exodus 15:24 we read that “the people grumbled at Moses, saying, ‘What shall we drink?’” And we read that the water they found was bitter but the Lord made it sweet and drinkable for them.

So, in chapter 16, the people are again grumbling against Moses complaining that they are hungry. Verse 1 states that this incident took place on the fifteenth day of the second month after they left Egypt. So, they have been on this journey for a month and a half, and their food supply has run out, and now they are hungry. When do we complain the most? When we are hungry, or tired.

But how often do we complain so much that we sound like the Israelites in verse 3? “The sons of Israel said to them, ‘Would that we had died by the Lord’s hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.’” The sons of Israel were

looking back to what they thought were the good old days. They were willing to be back in bondage in Egypt if it meant they would be able to satisfy their hunger for meat and bread. They did not trust that God would provide for their needs and that He had their best interest in mind.

Yet, the Lord was merciful towards them. Verse 4, "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction.'" The wilderness was a time of testing. They had come out of Egypt, where sure, their needs were met, but they were really in bondage. Now they are free, but they need to rely on God to provide for their needs. Will they pass the test? Or will they seek to return again to bondage in order to have their needs met? Will they trust and obey the Lord? Or will they seek their own way?

In verse 9 Moses tells Aaron to tell the congregation that the Lord has heard their grumblings, which he does in verse 10 and then we read that the congregation, "looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud. And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 'I have heard the grumblings of the sons of Israel; speak to them, saying, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread; and you shall know that I am the Lord your God.'" So, the Lord confirmed the words which He commanded Moses to speak by appearing in the cloud, which the congregation would have been familiar with since the cloud went before them by day to lead them through the wilderness.

And the Lord provided for the needs of the people just as He said that He would. Verse 13, "So it came about at evening that the 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 evaporated, behold, on the surface of the wilderness there was a fine flake-like thing, fine as the frost on the ground." That was the manna. The Lord provided quail for them to eat and manna as well. And for forty years, that's what they ate.

In verse 32-34 we are told that a portion of the manna was kept "before the Testimony." And we know from Hebrews 9:4-5 that the jar was kept in the ark of the covenant along with the ten commandments and Aaron's staff that budded. So, it'll be interesting to see the reaction of the Jews whenever the ark is found and opened up and they see that the manna is still there. Perhaps they will look back on the days that the Lord provided for their ancestors in the wilderness. Perhaps remembering that will help them to rely on the Lord in their own day.

Recall last week I said that Christ is seen in both the Old and New Testaments. In the Gospel reading for this week from John 6, we see this account in Exodus mentioned. And in verse 35 Jesus says, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst."

The manna points us to Christ. To see this with more clarity we need to begin from verse 1 of John 6. Jesus went to the "other side of the Sea of Galilee. A large crowd followed Him, because they saw the signs which He was performing on those who were sick. Then Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat down with His disciples." They were, in effect, in

the wilderness. And the crowd followed Jesus where He went just as the Israelites followed God through the wilderness in the days of the exodus.

The people got hungry, just as the Israelites did in Exodus. However, unlike in Exodus, nobody was grumbling. Except maybe the disciples who were wondering how on earth they would be able to provide enough food for everybody there. Turned out they had five barley loaves, bread, and two fish, meat. Sounds a little like manna and quail doesn't it? What happened? Jesus gave thanks and distributed to all who were seated. Everybody ate and were satisfied and there were 12 baskets full of leftovers. God provided bread and meat for the people.

That should have been enough of a sign for the people to realize who Jesus was. But they did not. Even the disciples didn't fully understand, as we are told in Mark 6:51-52 that when Jesus, after the feeding of the 5000, got into the boat and the wind stopped that the disciples were, "utterly astonished, for they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves." Nobody put 2 and 2 together and realized that Jesus was the Son of God.

So, the people question Jesus, in John 6:28 saying, "What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?" Verse 29, "Jesus answered and said to them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.'" And their reply is interesting. Verse 30, "So they said to Him, 'What then do You do for a sign, so that we may see, and believe You? What work do You perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, "He gave them bread out of heaven to eat."'"

They look for a sign to believe the Lord and even talk about God providing manna for their fathers in the wilderness. This after having bread and meat provided for them the day before on the mountainside by Jesus. They are still looking back on the good old days and not seeing God in their present! And He's right in front of them! The glory days are right then when Jesus is standing before them and speaking with them, and they are missing out! All because they are so stuck in the past that they cannot recognize the goodness of the present.

Jesus' reply is just awesome because it highlights God's provision for us. Verses 32-33, "Jesus then said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the **true bread** out of heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world.'" The true bread is not the manna because manna does not give life to the world. All manna did was sustain the Israelites and give them nourishment. The true bread gives life to the world. How? First, God created us and breathed the breath of life into us. Second, He provided for us the Way to eternal life with Him. And third, all who accept the true bread receive freedom from the bondage of sin and its curse of eternal death and receive eternal life. We know it as being born again.

What Jesus said is good, and from the next verse it sounded good to them because in verse 34 we read that, "Then they said to Him, 'Lord, always give us this bread.'" Verse 35, "Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.'" Unlike the manna, which had to be collected daily except on the Sabbath (The day prior to the Sabbath God provided a double portion), Jesus, the true

bread, came to die once for all. Once we accept Him as our Savior and trust Him as our Lord we do not hunger or thirst again, spiritually. He satisfies our deepest need entirely. With physical hunger, we eat, our stomach gets filled. We digest the food. Our stomach empties, and we need to refill it. With salvation we accept Christ, the true bread once, and then He doesn't leave us so that we are empty and have to eat again. He stays with us forever.

No matter what we face in this life, Christ is always with us. We have no need to grumble about how much better things were before we left our "Egypt," meaning before we accepted the Lord. Christ set us free from the bondage of sin. We do not turn back to that old life. The good old days are not back before we met the Lord. We do not need to look back even on fond memories and wish we could be back there. We just need to be able to see God in our past and realize that He was there with us to encourage us to walk closer with Him. He was there teaching us, helping us, sustaining us, providing for us.

The good old days are not now either, although because we are now in Christ these days are better than before. It is much better to be living as servants of God than of slaves to sin, that is for certain. And we have the benefit now of being able to see God at work in our lives and in the lives of those around us. That should encourage us, even embolden us to live as servants of Christ. It should help us to trust that God will continue to provide for us just as He always has.

For the Christian, the "good old days," the "glory days," are not in the past nor in the present, but in the future when Christ returns for us. When there is no pain or grief or disease or evil. Just life eternal. Life the way we were meant to live it. Serving the Lord in perfect peace. Where Revelation 7:16-17 states, "They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; ¹⁷for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes." Sound wonderful, doesn't it? Eternal life with God. That will be for us "glory days."

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen!