

Scripture is full of "God Stories" and I'm going to tell the one found in Exodus 16...

It was exactly one month after the Israelites left Egypt where they had been slaves

God sent Moses to free the Israelites from slavery in Egypt

After multiple plagues, Pharaoh finally said go!

After a month, their supplies were probably low and they began to worry/panic

The people were wandering in the desert and complaining about their conditions

They wished to return to slavery in Egypt because of the food provisions there

In true human fashion, they said...

"If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." Exodus 16:3

God graciously responded by raining down bread from heaven

They were to look towards the wilderness and the glory of the Lord appeared in clouds

God led them in the cloud by day and in the fire by night

God spoke through Moses and Aaron...

"Draw near to the LORD, for he has heard your complaining... At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the LORD your God." Exodus 16:9-12 NRSV

God provided quail in the evening and manna in the morning

Under the dew was a white substance that they could gather and grind as flour

The Israelites asked, "What is it?"—the literal meaning of the word *manna*

They were to gather up as much as they needed for one day

No matter how much they gathered, they all had 2 quarts per person

Some skimped and didn't use it all—but it spoiled and had worms

On the 6th day they were to gather enough for the 6th day and the Sabbath

4 quarts per person this time—but it didn't spoil and no worms

Nor was there any manna on the ground on the Sabbath

This was a reminder that God would take care of them

And a witness to the neighboring nations

For the 40 years they wandered in the desert, God supplied manna to feed them

The human tendency is to want to go back to the past—even though problematic

We compare the bad of the present to the good of the past

That gets us in trouble

We must tell the truth of our situation! But also remember honestly the past!

Like the Israelites, we too, have many stories of God's care and provision

Stories where we were led in ways that met our needs

Stories of times when miracles intervened in a difficult situation

Remember the stories! Both Biblical stories and our personal stories!

When the manna came—I love that everyone had enough, no matter how much they gathered

For those who hoarded and tried to get lots... and get ahead—they had just enough

Those, who for whatever reason, didn't get enough—had enough

That in itself is a huge lesson—the God of enough!

And that there is enough for everyone! That life truly can be win-win!

So often in our society that isn't true—yet in God's economy it is true!

Finally—for a Sabbath day of rest, there will be enough
You can take a day off and not work—it will be ok
The truth that there was enough food for them on the Sabbath without working was huge
As I said last Sunday, the weekly day of rest has no parallel in any other ancient culture
In ancient times, leisure was for the wealthy and the ruling classes only,
never for the serving or laboring classes.
In addition, the very idea of rest each week was unimaginable.
The Greeks thought Jews were lazy for having a "holiday" every seventh day.

Having provision on the Sabbath did take preparation
They had to gather extra on the day before—and only on that day
They were to boil or bake whatever they wanted, but the rest was saved for the Sabbath
It was just as good as if they had gathered it fresh
We do have to think ahead and plan for the Sabbath
It isn't a day that we slide into without thinking
But we can trust that taking a day of rest will not leave us without enough
In a society where we are told it is all up to me and we have to work harder—it's hard
But I firmly believe that taking a day to stop, play, worship, focus on God, etc. works
There is enough time in the other 6 days to do that which needs doing
On the other hand I can't put off until my Sabbath the assignment due the next morning

It takes time to learn new rhythms
The Israelites didn't get it right the first time either—they didn't trust and went out to gather
But there was nothing there on the morning of the Sabbath
Others didn't believe it wouldn't spoil—it spoiled before when held overnight
Grace yourself with taking small steps and learnings
If you forget—don't fret, just remember and go on about the day
Practice Sabbath without going "whole hog" to a legalistic view of Sabbath—a little is enough

Key to this whole thing is giving up worry, anxiety, and tension—fear
Even just taking a Sabbath day can be a way of taking a deep breath and relaxing—de-stressing
Sabbath can be an intentional setting aside of the "to do" list
The busier we get—it is a huge relief to know that time to stop is built into the schedule

My brother Roger sent an email from the hospital a few days before his son, Jeremi died
He was worried and having a hard time so read Scripture from Philippians 4:6-7 The Message
*Don't fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises **shape your worries into prayers**, letting God know your concerns. Before you know it, a sense of God's wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It's wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life.*
It gave him something to do with the worries—to shape them into prayers
Also knowing that God's wholeness was at work

My friend Mindy was teaching this story to the kids one Sunday—so they did a "grumble walk"
The kids really got into walking around the church and grumbling
Afterwards they did a "humble walk" and actually surprised themselves and got into it also
An important step in stopping the worry cycle is honest gratitude

This fits in well with our theme this winter of "Fear Not"

I've been wearing my button all week

Mostly folks don't say anything—but the bank teller asked about it so I explained

For those who want to wear it on their leather jackets, I've ordered clip buttons

This week I got a phone call from a man who attends Arch Street Friends Meeting, Philadelphia

He felt that our Fear Not message was so powerful and needed he ordered 100 buttons

Being next to Independence Hall—they are so aware of the political environment

Particularly in the last few months it has escalated for them

Poignant was the visit of Post Francis and the extreme security involved

He felt our message was both needed and powerful and wants to share it with others

I've ordered the button making materials to make 100 more buttons

Another friend who is a pastor in Olympia has ordered a dozen buttons

The world is afraid!

Our message from Christmas is that we don't have to live inside that fear

It is one of trust in the living God—trust in Jesus, our Lord and Savior

Trust that we are enough

Trust that we can hear Leadings and follow

I'm reminded of George Fox (founder of Quakers) who refused to get out of jail by joining the army

*But I told them **I lived in the virtue of that life and power that took away the occasion of all wars**, and I knew from whence all wars did rise, from the lust according to James's doctrine. Still they courted me to accept their offer and thought that I did but compliment with them. But I told them I was come into the covenant of peace which was before wars and strifes were.*¹

Fear is a huge part of military strategy in war—creating fear of the enemy

Choosing "Fear Not" is choosing not to buy into the propaganda we are fed

Taking Sabbath is another way that we don't buy in to the fear message

Choosing to stay within the "life and power that [takes] away the occasion of all war"

Listen to the words of Jesus from The Message Bible, Luke 12

"Don't fuss about what's on the table at mealtimes or if the clothes in your closet are in fashion. There is far more to your inner life than the food you put in your stomach, more to your outer appearance than the clothes you hang on your body. Look at the ravens, free and unfettered, not tied down to a job description, carefree in the care of God. And you count far more.

"Has anyone by fussing before the mirror ever gotten taller by so much as an inch? If fussing can't even do that, why fuss at all? Walk into the fields and look at the wildflowers. They don't fuss with their appearance—but have you ever seen color and design quite like it? The ten best-dressed men and women in the country look shabby alongside them. If God gives such attention to the wildflowers, most of them never even seen, don't you think he'll attend to you, take pride in you, do his best for you?"

Here is the part that this has been leading up to—the part that speaks directly to our condition

¹ *The Journal of George Fox*, edited by John L. Nickalls, Religious Society of Friends, Philadelphia, 1995, page 65.

"What I'm trying to do here is get you to relax, not be so preoccupied with getting so you can respond to God's giving. People who don't know God and the way he works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how he works. Steep yourself in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met. Don't be afraid of missing out. You're my dearest friends! The Father wants to give you the very kingdom itself. "

*Be generous. Give to the poor. Get yourselves a bank that can't go bankrupt, a bank in heaven far from bankrobbers, safe from embezzlers, a bank you can bank on. It's obvious, isn't it? The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being.
Luke 12:22-34 MSG*

I love that this passage ends with generosity

It is this generosity that counteracts the fear around us

Talking with others this week, we asked ourselves—what is the positive side of "Fear Not"?

After Listening, it resonated with us that it is to "practice goodness" or "practice small kindness"

Noticing a need and responding says to that person that they aren't alone

That someone noticed

It counters the fear that I'm not enough