



Traditional Worship • August 5

A New Thing

- Today's Sanctuary flowers given by Don & Susan Travis to the glory of God in honor of their wedding anniversary.
- Today's choral selections are provided by the Temple Choir under the direction of Don Travis. Organist: Barbara Waite. Pre-service & Communion Music provided by Susan Travis, pianist.
- Ushers (5): Kathy Zelle, captain; Chuck Taylor, Warren Heinsohn, Jack Buttrum, Ed Ancona, Thornton Patberg (balcony), Margo Borre (balcony)
- Ushers (12): Greg & Linda Stilwell, captains; Chuck Taylor, Jacque Hardin, Nelson & Joyse Rivers
- Greeters (5): Sue Anderson, Patricia Helm, Nancy Hughes
- Greeters (12): Marty Van Stone, Wanda Erwin, Carla Bolin, Janet Kissel

ORDER OF WORSHIP

PRE-SERVICE MUSIC

WELCOME

PRELUDE

"Holy Manna" arr. R. Haan

CALL TO WORSHIP

Leader: Sing aloud to God! Shout with joy!

People: God, our host, welcomes us.

Leader: God reminds us, "I brought you out of the land of Egypt and gave you all you needed."

People: When we opened our hands, God gave us good things.

All: Let us worship God.

CHORAL INTROIT

"The House of God" by Bob Burroughs

*CHIMES & SERVICES OF LIGHT

*FIRST HYMN #127

"Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah"

*PASSING OF THE PEACE

Leader: May the peace of Christ be with you.

People: And also with you.

Leader: Please turn to those around you and pass the peace of Christ.

CALL TO PRAYER

Leader: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Leader: Let us listen for God in the silence.

PASTORAL PRAYER

All: Living God, all Your plans are good. Teach us to move at Your bidding, to follow You into paradise and into the wilderness. Send Your Holy Spirit to show us the way. Let us be a part of Your new creation. And now, O God, hear as we pray, each in our own hearts and our own ways...

GIVING OFFERING

"Come, Let Us Eat" arr. by J. W. Kerr

*DOXOLOGY *the congregation stands as the Ushers return the offering to the Altar.*

#94 in Hymnal

ANTHEM

"Joy in the Morning" by Natalie Sleeth

KIDZ MOMENT

Promotion Sunday

SCRIPTURE READING

Exodus 16:1-4, 13-18

SCRIPTURE RESPONSE TFWS #2120

"Spirit, Spirit of Gentleness (refrain)"

MESSAGE *by Pastor JillAnn Knonenborg*

"A New Thing"

I'm pumped today. Really, I'm so excited to be the Associate Pastor of Methodist Temple in this season. And I'll tell you why: since January, 12 leaders in this congregation as well as myself and Pastor Andy have met each month to dream with God about the future of our church, and it has been really cool. We learned about the amazing history of this community; and we looked for the doors that God is opening for us now. We're going to talk in a good bit of detail in our upcoming sermon series about the vision that this team has seen for the church, but for today we're going to talk about Moses and the Israelites and magic cereal because I think we find ourselves in a very similar place. We are somewhere we've never been before facing a situation without an instruction manual, and yet, God has already given us everything we need.

Will you pray with me? Gracious God as I strive to deliver your message this morning may you increase and we decrease. For it is written that only in giving up our lives will we find them. Amen.

Today's story picks up immediately after the greatest, most wonderful event in Israelite history. After four hundred years as slaves to Pharaoh, the Israelites have been delivered to freedom by God. And now all of them, thousands of them, are headed across the Sinai Peninsula to find a homeland. Now I think it's important to say at this juncture that contrary to popular belief the entire Middle East is not just a big sandy desert like we sometimes see on TV; however, Sinai kind of is. There's very little water, very little food, and the Israelites are mostly traveling on foot. They call it the wilderness for a reason because it's wild and unpredictable and it goes on for as far as the eye can see.

So unsurprisingly it does not take long for the high of freedom to fade away. The golden age of gratitude for God's blessing is short lived, and then the fear starts to set in and the anxiety and the micromanaging and of course nostalgia. About 10 minutes into the car ride, I imagine Moses here from the back seat, 'Are we there yet? She's touching me.' And most of the. Most of all, 'I'm hungry.' The Israelites quickly form what I have heard called a back to Egypt campaign committee. 'Let's go back to being slaves', they say. 'We'd rather be treated like cattle by the Egyptians if it means we can feel safe and secure. The wilderness is too scary. There are too many unknowns. What if we lose more than we gain by doing this new thing?' Sure God promised to take care of us, but it doesn't feel like He is these days'. So God and Moses have a little chat. God will send bread and quail each morning for the Israelites to collect; and the next day, sure enough, the ground is covered in Frosted Flakes as far as I can tell. God has indeed answered the prayer of the Israelites. They were hungry and he gave them a valley full of flakes of bread. It's exactly what the Israelites needed. There's plenty to go around, and each day God will send more.- one day at a time.

So what do you think is the Israelites first response to this miracle? What is it? That's literally what the word mana means in Hebrew- What is it? The Israelites are staring right at their salvation, holding it in their hands, and they don't even know what it is. If God hadn't given Moses that little heads up, the Israelites might well have walked right past a field of food. A mile up the road they could have been complaining that God had abandoned them when he had put the answer to their prayer right in front of them. It would be easy to miss because mana is new; because it's hard to trust anything that you find in the wilderness.

Have you ever tried to get kids to eat new food? I'll take that laughter as a yes. I admit I was the worst picky eater as a kid. I'll eat just about anything now, but back then, I mean it didn't matter if it was cake, if it looked different or it smelled different it was not happening. I so dreaded the possibility that I would taste the food and not like it that I pushed everything away. And to be fair to kids, it's not just a kid thing. When I started dating my now husband, he'll tell you I was the biggest commitment foe. I refused for months to make our relationship official on Facebook even though I was madly in love with him. I didn't want to make holiday plans. I didn't want him to meet my family, so I asked my friend Allie, 'why is it that I feel like this?' And she told me something very wise. She said because you're letting fear make your decisions for you. You're going to miss out on the best thing that you've ever had because you're scared that you can't control it.

What am I getting at here? Well, the Christian church in the United States is in the wilderness, my friends. For the first time in our history, one in three Americans under the age of 40 says they have no religious affiliation whatsoever. The vast majority still believe in God or a higher power, but they are done with the church. According to Barna Group, when non-Christians are asked to describe a Christian, the first words they come up with are judgmental and hypocritical. I confess that when I drive around Evansville and I see billboards screaming 'Are you going to hell tonight?' I can get the same impression. Frankly I don't care if the institutional church outlives me. I mean I do, but not really. The reason I care about those statistics and demographics is that they revealed that there are millions of people- 1.3 million in Indiana actually, who have not been told that they are perfectly and endlessly loved by God. There are millions of people who don't know that their life stories are threads in God's great story of deliverance and freedom. Even if our pews were bursting on Sunday morning, but people didn't know that they are loved, I would still say that we've failed in our mission.

The world has changed. The easy comfortable days in Egypt are gone. We are in unfamiliar territory being confronted by something we can't even name, and apparently that is how our God gives blessings. For those of us who do this church leadership thing for a living, rarely a week goes by that we don't hear about the decline of the church or the death of the church. On and on and on. Maybe you've heard that talk as well. I don't see it that way though. I look around me in Evansville at neighborhoods that are full of hunger, addiction, & violence. I look at young people who are desperate for connection and meaning. I look at a society that has become disillusioned with money and power. It is a wilderness, but it is also an opportunity like we have not had in a long, long time. This world is crying out for the good news of God's love and forgiveness. Finally we can do away with the church as just a fancy building or the church as just a social club and be who Jesus created us to be. Once again the church can be any community where people live to serve others. You don't need the biggest budget or the highest Sunday attendance to do that.

The Israelites in the wilderness thought that they were at the end of the road. They thought the wilderness would kill them, and instead, the wilderness was the very place that God used to save them and make them into God's people. So the thing that we don't understand, it's a blessing. We can scoff at it if we want to, or we can be nourished by it in ways that we have never been nourished before. People who don't look like us or talk like us or live like us, they're a blessing. New experiences that make us anxious, they're a blessing. Trying something new- even if we can't know the outcome- what a blessing. In fact they're not just blessings, they're exactly what we need.

There's one more thing I want to draw out from this story of the manna. I'd never noticed it before that when the Israelites entered the wilderness led by God's fiery cloud, they do it together. Nobody stays behind in Egypt and says 'Nah, you guys go on without me. Nobody says no, no you guys take the mana. I'll wait for something better.' The Israelites are bound together in common purpose because they know that they don't just need God in the wilderness, they need one another. They know that the wilderness is a place to come together, not to be driven apart. Everyone takes the journey- not just leaders like Moses and Miriam, not just the young people or the old people, not just men or women. They are led into the wilderness as individuals, they're led as a community in which everyone has a role to play.

I hope, I pray that in the months to come, Methodist Temple will follow their example. I hope that we will walk into the wilderness holding hands and gather up unexpected blessings together. So if you're feeling brave, if that sounds like a journey that you should sign up for, there is a slip of paper in your bulletin. It asks for your name and contact info and then it asks 'What do you enjoy? What are you good at?' In other words, how has God made you a blessing, made you mana for this community? I invite you to fill out that slip of paper and leave it in one of the baskets at the exit after worship. And I promise that in next week someone will be in touch with you to talk about some ways that you could get involved in this new journey. No pressure. If you fill it out, there's no commitment. It's just an invitation to join the caravan as it were.

I do find some comfort in that saying which is from the Bible, 'There's nothing new under the sun.' This isn't the first time that we've heard warnings about the death of the church. Way back in the early 1500's when Martin Luther demanded reforms and change in the church, he was accused of trying to destroy it. People said that he would be personally responsible for the death of Christianity because he was pushing too far and too fast and the whole institution would collapse under the stress. And it did. The Protestant Reformation broke up the Christian Church of Europe and then rebuilt it. And any good that has been done in the world since then by Lutherans, Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, etc. is partly owed to Luther's courage. He may have been afraid of the wilderness, but he still marched in. That's always been the story of God's people -beginning with the Israelites, right up to the present moment. We can be confident that we are following in God's path when we're thirsty, hungry, and a little bit terrified. It is in that moment that God will show up in a new, unexpected way. It is in that moment that we will be fed. Amen.

*LAST HYMN #645

"God the Spirit, Guide and Guardian"

*CHIMES & SERVICE OF LIGHT

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE

"Prelude in F" by J. S. Bach