

The Lord *Will* Provide

Exodus 16:2-4, 9-15

Ephesians 4:1-8

Perhaps those who have lived here longer may remember other encouraging moments that fizzled. Perhaps some initiative got announced, only to fade into oblivion. But I must say that in the six years we have lived in Terre Haute, I cannot recall a more promising day than last Thursday. On August 1st, the Tribune-Star ran two stories adjacent on the front page. One documented how the Next Step program had broken ground for housing for pregnant and/or parenting women suffering from addiction. The housing will include a day care center. We have three grandchildren who might require day care. But their parents can afford even the often exorbitant price of it. Not so these women. Currently, many of them live in their cars. Others face the daily task of securing housing with different relatives or friends. Meanwhile, they are using. Alcohol, meth, you name it, they are using.

What must those children's lives be like?!? Thank God for programs like Next Step. Using funding from the State of Indiana, United Way and private donors, they will build a facility that offers apartments, on-site day care and on-site addiction counseling. *That* is one way I want my tax dollars spent.

The other newspaper story that brought me hope concerned the conversion of

about 16,000 square feet of the Meadows into a tuition-free high school for adults. Called the Goodwill Excel Center of West Central Indiana, this will become a charter school. The newspaper reported 80 students have already applied, even before much publicity has gone out into the community. The state will fund it, as well, and they have secured a one-time grant from the federal ARPA fund, approved by the Terre Haute city council, of a quarter-million dollars. They will use that money to convert the space at the Meadows into classrooms, an on-site day care facility, and more. Linda and I made the mistake of buying a large house when we came here. It is about 2,900 square feet. The Excel facility will come to about five and one-half times that size. And as long as we are doing numbers, according to the state census bureau, Vigo County has 10,464 adults who lack a high school diploma. The same bureau states that the county has just about 100,000 residents. This means that well over ten percent of all adults living around us lack even a basic education. Thank God for programs like Goodwill Excel. *That* is one way I want my tax dollars spent.

We say, "God will provide". And I, for one, believe it. But I wonder whether we mean, "God will provide for *me*." Our two scripture passages today contain references to the gifts God gives. Exodus 16 tells the story of God's provision of manna each morning, and quail for at least one night, to the wandering children of Israel. They have walked out of Egypt, surviving the passing through the waters with the Pharaoh's chariots in hot pursuit. They have gone a few days into the Sinai Peninsula, one of the nastier places on Earth. They have suffered hunger and thirst. And they have complained. Man, have they complained. When you help somebody out of a tight

spot and they complain, how do you react?

God reacted graciously. God provided. Bible scholar Gerhard von Rad has noted that the entire story of Exodus “comes in the frame of disobedience.” He means that the Israelites never seem able wholly to go along with the program. No matter how clearly God speaks, no matter how obvious the correct path may be, they cannot follow it. Just two chapters later in Exodus, God will give them the Ten Commandments. When Moses carries the first set of those tablets down the mountain, he will find them worshipping an idol made from their jewelry. Thus, they break commandments one through three before even receiving them in writing. Yet God reacts to their complaints generously. Copiously. When they rant about their hunger God gives them manna in the mornings, and quail.

Scholars have long noted the close connection between this passage and Psalm 78. One of the oldest chapters in the Bible, Psalm 78 comes from well before King David lived. Estimates vary, but it appears this Psalm is between 3,150 and 3,600 years old. Yet its themes speak with savage accuracy to human nature, which has not changed in all that time. Psalm 78 is long, 72 verses, and its content revolves repeatedly between confessions of sin on behalf of the people, and expressions of gratitude for God's grace. Were God not gracious who could stand? A man once came into my office and told of an extra-marital affair he had conducted with his wife's best friend. It lasted nearly two years. It ended only when the guilt overwhelmed him. In what was perhaps a rash move, he confessed to his wife what he had been doing.

Her response? “I know what's going on. I was waiting for you to tell me.” And while the sailing was not exactly smooth for a number of months, they made it work. Where does one find the quality, the love, to react to betrayal with such grace? It can come only from God, who has modeled that behavior for us again and again.

In our passage from his letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul *begs* those Christians to “lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Exactly. Whether in a marriage or in a church, our very identity must reflect these qualities. The world does not value them. We do not get paid for exhibiting them. Except we do. Our payment comes not in the form of money, but of communion. We experience real fellowship, real bonding, when we *live* them.

Paul concludes our passage with, “But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.” Christ gave his very life for us. The measure of his gift exceeds anything we can possibly match. Yet we must attempt to imitate him. Give grace. Forgive. Forbear. Years later that man who had the affair and his wife are still married. They would laugh if anybody called their relationship exemplary. But it is. He has said that when she forgave him, he loved his wife more than he ever had before. She has said that while it took time, she has come to trust him. They are honest with each other in a way they never had been before. Give, and receive, grace. It makes life doable. It makes life sweet. It conforms to Christ's calling.