

Exodus 16: 2 The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.

3 The Israelites said to them, "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."

4 Then the LORD said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not.

5 On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days."

6 So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "In the evening you shall know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt,

7 and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your complaining against the LORD. For what are we, that you complain against us?"

8 And Moses said, "When the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the LORD has heard the complaining that you utter against him-- what are we? Your complaining is not against us but against the LORD."

9 Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, 'Draw near to the LORD, for he has heard your complaining.'"

10 And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud.

11 The LORD spoke to Moses and said,

12 "I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, '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.'"

13 In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp.

14 When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground.

15 When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat.

Matthew 20:1 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.

2 After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard.

3 When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace;

4 and he said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went.

5 When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same.

6 And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, 'Why are you standing here idle all day?'

7 They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard.'

8 When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.'

9 When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage.

10 Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage.

11 And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner,

12 saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.'

13 But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage?'

14 Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you.

15 Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?'

16 So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

Loving Creator shine as a light before me that you may be seen and not I. Give me words that I may speak give us ears that we may hear and through your Holy Spirit help us understand.

Amen.

Jesus is always giving us these strange stories, bizarre ideas to ponder. The last will be first and the first will be last. Occasionally he explains himself, but most of the time he just lets these parables hang there.

The workers who worked all day wanted to know what was going on too. This isn't fair. The workers who worked 10 hours get the same as the ones who worked for one hour. The math doesn't work out here. The all day workers are prepared to argue their point based on the math, they have the proof to say that the workers who only worked an hour deserved less than they did.

Proof. That word always conjures up images of math for me. I remember learning geometry proofs. The proof that says: segment A is 1 inch, segment b is 1 inch, angle C is 90 degrees, angle d is 90 degrees, it is a square- Quod Erat Demonstrandum: thus it is proved.

I have no desire to beat up on accountants, or mathematicians, or geometricians, we need them. But sometimes, when counting becomes our bottom line, when the need for proof takes over, we lose out.

The stories of the Exodus always have this kind of flavor. Moses told the people that God was with them. The Israelites, as they travelled in the desert, were caught up in their own desires, they did not remember that God was with them. In today's story they wanted food. Who could blame them? They were going to die without food. They were going by their experience.

Here is the proof: if a person does not eat, they starve to death. There was no food. They were going to die. Quod Erat Demonstrandum.

Moses could have listened to them. He could have gone looking for food where one might expect to find food. Maybe there was a Big Y somewhere around the next mountain. Moses helps them to see a different picture. Moses helps them to find a new proof.

Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "In the evening you shall know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD.

That night, what the Israelites thought they knew was turned upside-down. Birds flew into the camp, and in the morning there was manna. All of their doubts were turned around, they had new proof, proof that God was with them.

I'm glad that we have moved beyond wanting proof. As a society we are better able to see the big picture and understand what is happening in our world.

Reuel Howe, a professor at Virginia Theological Seminary, ran a lab in Berkeley in the 1960s. He did "people experiments." He set people in specially created situations, to see how they would respond. Their response became their learning.

At this particular lab, the group was given a piece of wood, and told to reach some agreement about its length, without measuring it in any way – purely an eyeball estimate. Then they were to gather as many others as possible who agreed.

One person had been told beforehand the exact length, but he was not allowed to reveal the source of his knowledge. As far as the rest were concerned, he was guessing just as much as they were.

The estimates varied widely.

The only agreement was that no one agreed with the one person who had the correct answer. He tried to gather several groups but couldn't get other people to agree with him.

So eventually, he joined a group who advocated the wrong answer. When he was asked, at the end of the exercise, why he would throw his lot in with a wrong answer, when he knew the right one, he replied, "I'd rather be wrong than alone."

Without proof the person with the right answer went along with a wrong answer.

Gilbert Plass, in 1955, concluded that adding more carbon dioxide to the atmosphere would intercept infrared radiation that is otherwise lost to space, warming the earth. He was widely scorned by scientists who said there was no proof.

During the 60s and 70s when temperatures seemed to be cooling, his theory looked foolish. But as the climate began to change in the 80s, and as we had the warmest year on record in the 90s, some people began to rethink their opposition to global warming.

There are still people who protest that it cannot be proved that global warming is real. Others who admit the planet is warming refuse to believe it is caused by human activity.

The argument they make is that if it cannot be proved, they will not believe it.

The same argument is often made for God. Prove God exists, then I'll believe. If these same people had been there in the camp with the Israelites the night the quail flew into the camp, they would have said that it was just a coincidence. The manna was a naturally occurring thing they just happened to find it.

God is like Bigfoot, or like the Loch Ness Monster, or the Easter Bunny. If we can't prove it is not real.

Do we really need proof that God exists? If so, what would it look like?

A new research project was just started at the University of Southampton in the UK called AWARE. They are researching the phenomenon of near death experiences. They will be putting images in emergency rooms that could only be seen from the ceiling. If patients after being resuscitated can recall seeing these images, it will prove that consciousness is not dependent on the brain.

This study will take place over several years so we'll have to wait for a response, but my guess is that even if this experiment showed that the human consciousness is separate from the body, skeptics will still find no proof for God.

What it all comes down to in the end is faith.

How can we prove that God exists? How can we prove that Jesus rose from the dead? How can we prove that the Holy Spirit guides us? How can we prove that we are loved and welcomed into a family that is not limited by this earthly existence?

We can't. Isn't that wonderful! It's a beautiful thing.

It is also a bit frustrating at times.

We may have trouble believing at times. We may have questions and doubts. We may even turn from God from time to time.

The amazing thing about our God, the astounding thing about coming to Jesus is that that is all we need to do. If you have always come to church your whole life and never even doubted you are welcomed and loved.

If you found your faith as a child or as a teen, you get the same love. If you found Jesus when you became an adult or after some difficulty in your life, you get the same love. If you receive the Good News of Jesus as an old person near the end of life, you get the same love.

Like the workers who arrived to work at different times, everyone gets the same pay.

God's love knows no bounds; God's forgiveness is open to us all. And we have only to accept it. We will not have proof, at least not proof like finding the bones of bigfoot or Nessie. We will not get the kind of proof that will convince skeptics, but what we do receive is the assurances of God in ways that help us believe.

We could wait for the study to hear from people who have returned from the dead, but I'm sure that will not convince people. Jesus said, **"If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."**

When we pray, or when we place our cares before God, and then we see an answer, that is an affirmation, not a proof. The quail and the manna were affirmations of God's presence, but they were not proofs, the cloud and the fire were affirmations that God was leading the people not proofs.

Paul says, **the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "The one who is righteous will live by faith."**

If you want proof, take geometry, or become an accountant, but we don't need any proof at all to follow Jesus or to be God's children, all that takes is faith.

Thanks be to God.  
AMEN.