

Year A Creation 3, 20th September 2026

Exodus 16:2-15. Philippians 1:21-30. Matthew 20: 1-16

All Manner/Manna of Things from God

It wasn't until I was researching for this sermon that I found out that there is a word play in our reading from Exodus. The Hebrew for 'What is it?' is 'Man- ha'. The reply is spelt differently but is a homophone, it sounds exactly like Man-ha but the bread is spelt manna. So, this mysterious substance sent to sustain the grumbling Hebrews is called 'What is it'.

Who says there isn't a sense of humour running through Scripture!

Moses and Aaron, the leaders who brought the people out of slavery, have quickly become unpopular. All the people are grumbling, remembering the food they ate in Egypt, but conveniently forgetting the terrible conditions of enforced slave labour they had endured for generations. God heard the grumbling and graciously provided for the people. He provided manna, or 'what is it' in English.

But let us not get too fixed on the substance itself. Rather, let us focus on what God did and said. This was God showing how God's economy worked. Enough would be provided for each day. But the people were not to collect more than they needed for that day. If they did so, and flouted God's instructions, the food would not be fit for eating the following day. Only on the day before the Sabbath could people collect two days' worth of food.

The food did not miraculously appear on their plates or outside the entrances of their tents. The people had to go out and gather the

manna and the it was the same with the quails that came down in the evening.

There was an abundance of food, but the people were not to hoard it. Any hoarding would be counter-productive, in God's economy. I pondered what might drive someone to hoard food that God had promised to provide daily? The most obvious answer is that if you did not trust God, you would be anxious that there would be no food the following day, and others would not share what they had.

Some people did keep food for the following day and found it had become 'wormy and rotten'.

In today's world we value hoarding – well hoarding of wealth I mean. Many are lauded in the Press and on television for achieving great wealth. Some of this is down to hard work and dedication, and I don't think many people would deny them some financial rewards for that. But, what is an acceptable level of hoarding wealth? I don't feel qualified to answer as to quite where the line is, but in today's world there are people who are major outliers who have such inconceivably large amounts of wealth, that it is plain to see that the amount of money they have gained and then hoard, is so far beyond what they need to live comfortably for many lifetimes over, that it is actually obscene. I use that word, obscene, on purpose.

Oxfam and the Stockholm Environment Institute report states that the top 1% wealthiest people in the world are responsible for 16% - 17% of global greenhouse gas emissions¹. Incredibly the top one per cent emit more per annum than the poorest two-thirds of the rest of the population of the world. A 2025 study published in *Nature Climate Change* took this further by analysing the historical impact,

¹ <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/richest-1-emit-much-planet-heating-pollution-two-thirds-humanity>

finding that the wealthiest 1% is responsible for 20% (one-fifth) of all observed global warming since 1990.

Their emissions are not solely from their own activities with private jets, yachts, and many houses requiring heating and air-conditioning. It is their investments in carbon-intensive industries that also add to their carbon footprint.

And it seems the more wealth they hoard, the more they want. It is seldom that someone with wealth aims to dispose of the majority it for the benefit of the world. Luckily there are a few, and their money has funded vaccination programmes, eliminated polio from developing countries, funded research into malaria, food programmes, and so much more.

Our epistle is a letter by Paul from prison to the faith community in Philippi. Paul is reflecting on his life, and pondering his death; assuming he may well be executed for his faith. His reflections lead him to urge the faith community in Philippi to *'live your life in a **manner** worthy of the gospel of Christ'*. I am using the wordplay for manna again here, although of course this time manner is manner; the dictionary definition being, *'the way anything is done, method, fashion, personal style or bearing, social conduct, good behaviour.'*

In today's world, with all the scientific facts at our fingertips about the causes of climate change and what actions need to be taken to rapidly reduce our personal and national emissions of greenhouse gases, what does Paul's exhortation mean to you, when he says, *'live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ'*.

How are we to view consumerism, encouraging us to consume more and more products? How are we to view the extraction of resources from the earth? If everyone in the world used resources at the same rate as we do in the UK, we would need between 2.4 and 2.6 'earths'

to meet the demand². To put it another way, we are consuming about two and half times the level of resources than is sustainable, and because of our consumption, many others have to live without those resources, because, in case you haven't noticed, there is only one earth!

In the past I have exhorted you to seek ways to reduce your own carbon footprint, maybe by using less plastics, eating a greater proportion of plants in your diet, insulating your homes, not flying as frequently, etc. Whilst doing that I was only too aware that a small group of individuals isn't going to make the change required to save our planet, God's wonderful Creation, but it does show intent and helps us appreciate what can be done at a national and international level. If our changes influence others to make similar changes, then it starts to make an impact across the country. It also acknowledges our own complicity in a consumerist society, and demonstrates that we don't want it to drive our behaviours.

Our gospel reading provides a stark lesson in God's economy, based on generosity, on everyone receiving sufficient for each day, and shared community wellbeing. A day's wage enabled a family to live for that day, so to deny someone a day's wage because they were hired later condemns them to not being able to feed themselves and their family for that day, and that can lead into an economic and health downward spiral all too easily.

I conclude with Paul's words, and to ask you to reflect on them for yourselves. It is not for me to answer for you, it is between you and God. How will each one of us respond, in face of all we know about the climate emergency, to Paul's exhortation: *'live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ'*.

² <https://overshoot.footprintnetwork.org/how-many-earths-or-countries-do-we-need/>