

Grits, Greens and Butterbeans  
Psalm 78 & Exodus 16:1-2 1  
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The Rev. Tim Brown  
Lake Forest Presbyterian Church  
Lake Forest, Illinois

The Deep South is unlike any other region in the country in the way we view our food. Here, food is held in *high reverence*. Recipes are as sacred as the relationships between family and friends. They are handed down from generation to generation, from friend to friend, with loyalty of exact duplication—with names just as cherished—Aunt-Betty’s Huckleberry-Pie, Jackie’s-Killer Crab-Dip, Holly’s-holy-coconut cake. If you’re from the south then you know that Southerners have a deep commitment to custom and tradition. And our commitment to food is founded upon TRUST and PROVISION.

### **The Food**

I was raised in a home where my family celebrated our meals together. Whether Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving or a birthday party, good food was always included. In the south, a big dinner included: fried skillet corn cut fresh from the cob, Louisiana wild rice, brown gravy, fried okra, butterbeans, mustard greens cooked in bacon grease (My Grandmother used to say that would keep your joints from squeaking), with enough pot liquor to float a pawn of cornbread. For dessert: Fresh hot dewberry cobbler topped off with homemade vanilla ice cream.

Breakfast always meant cathead biscuits with homemade pear preserves, fried eggs, platters of sausage and bacon, cold sliced layover tomatoes as big as the palm of your hand, sometimes fried squirrel and always plenty of grits. The food we shared may have looked or sounded strange, but it was always delicious. For those of you unfortunate to have been born in some other region of the country, I can only say, that until you’ve tried it, you can’t appreciate it! Especially, those grits. “What’s a grit anyway?” once asked one my seminary buddies. “You know, I’m not really sure,” I responded. “But, I really don’t care because it tastes so good.”

Of course, I realize to get some of you to try grits, greens and butterbeans, you would have to either really trust me and my bride's cooking or else be at the point of starvation, like the Israelites wandering in the desert.

## **The Israelites**

In our text today the Israelites were hungry. They had only been out of Egypt for one month, and they had eaten through all of their supplies. They were in the middle of the desert with no apparent food sources. The people had become anxious, worried, and angry. They began to blame their leaders for their predicament.

Just a few weeks earlier, God had led them out of bondage in Egypt, rescued them from a massacre, drowned their captives in the Red Sea, provided water for them to drink, yet unbelievably they still did not trust God or Moses' leadership.

They began to grumble, "Would we have died, had we stayed in Egypt? At least they fed us good! But now you4 Moses, you have brought all of us out here into the desert to kill us."

Psalms 78 gives us some insight as to what they were feeling, "Why can't God give us a good meal? How about some fresh baked bread, or a decent cut of meat?" This made God furious and His anger flared. You see they did not TRUST God or believe that God would continue to PROVIDE.

This is where Israel could have used some really good news, Matt 6:25-34 Jesus said, "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore, do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

Well, they get some good news straight from heaven. "God commanded the clouds, opened the doors of heaven and rained down the bread of angels."

The next morning the Israelites woke to see something on the ground that they had never seen. “What is it?” they asked. It was manna, which in Hebrew literally means, “What is it?”

God had provided them with what they needed, with what they desired—bread; manna. Even though Israel deserved to be punished by God and certainly did not deserve God’s blessing—God mercifully, and gracefully blessed them with his promised care. He heard their cries, He knew their pain, God made His presence known and The Glory of God was witnessed.

### **Conditional Provision**

There was however a condition to receiving the angel bread, the manna. Yes, the gift of bread was free, but it had to be accepted properly. God would test their trust. He told them to gather just enough for one day, no more, no less—one OMER a piece—a one day supply for each person. The reason God did this was two-fold:

To build their trust in Him alone for what they needed: to rely on God’s providence.

To build their trust in one another: to build community.

How did Israel respond to God’s providential blessing? Moses pulled them together. He had them draw near, not as individuals, but gathered them as a community in response to God’s blessings. They experienced a new hope and a new promise. They bore witness that Almighty God was their God, and they were His people. In spite of their mistrust the Lord was graceful and He provided. They would go on to trust as God faithfully provided everything they needed to live. He established their community in Him. –Some would still ask, can man live on bread alone? Some of the Israelites did not think so. Some acted selfishly. Out of their own worry and fear, they hoarded bread. But the bread they hoarded became foul and it ruined.

Their lack of faith kept them from getting God’s best, from becoming what God had intended. You see, they thought that gathering more manna would secure

more bread. They did not trust in God's timing or God's witness. They should have trusted in the Lord to guide and provide. They should have trusted in one another as well.

### **What about us?**

Are we so different? We face tests in life everyday. When we do, many of us prioritize, our lives around motives and ambitions. We put ourselves first. We selfishly seek to get ahead of the other guy, to get in front, to push our agendas through. We want things done our way because, frankly, we know what's best for us. At other times, we are afraid. We are scared to death of what the future may hold, so we tend to become "opportunist." We begin to cut corners, we secretly seek alternate paths to secure our future when no one else is looking, and we deceive ourselves and others. We look out for number one.

Friends, this is not what Almighty God wants for you. Don't you know that even in our wilderness, we still belong to God, to one another, and by God we should trust God that He will provide! He wants you to trust in him. He wants to provide for you in His community.

He has heard our cries, He has witnessed our pain. He knows what we are really hungry for. And He has done something about it. He has given us manna. And that manna is you - your prayers, your support, your missionaries.

He has set the table and provided the banquet meal in the bread of life, Jesus Christ. You see, we cannot solve the problems of life through our own efforts. We can't collect enough, store enough, or save enough to get ahead in this life physically, mentally or spiritually. But God has provided us with just what we need.

All we can do, the most we can do, the best thing we can do is accept what he has offered. When you trust God you will see His blessing and see your community flourish in Him. This is what God wants for the saints of First Presbyterian Church.

Today, my church gathers as a community in God's presence, tested and uncertain. We do not know what tomorrow will bring. Yet, we know that we have been blessed by God's grace in Jesus Christ. Trusting, that as we gather together, he will be providing the one thing we are all dying for—what is it?—your manna—the bread of life that has been broken and is to be shared by you in Jesus Christ. Trust in God, He will provide for our community. This is the gift of grace of Almighty God. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, Amen.