

TITLE: "Not with Those Timid Souls"

TEXT: Exodus 16:1-15 (OT pp. 62-63)

The whole congregation of the Israelites set out from Elim; and Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. ²The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. ³The 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."

⁴Then 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. ⁵On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days."

⁶So 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, ⁷and 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?" ⁸And 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."

⁹Then 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. ¹¹The 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.'"

¹³In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. ¹⁴When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. ¹⁵When 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."

Introduction – Answers, and questions, are changing every day

Dana West is a preschool teacher. "One of the things I try to teach my students," she writes, "is the name of each day of the week. Every morning I ask them what day it is. One morning I asked my usual question, and after several children guessed wrong, I said, 'It's Thursday! Thursday!' ...After a moment of puzzled silence, one little girl said (in frustration) "Miss Dana, you change the answer every day!" (*Catholic Digest* 12/87 "Change")

I'm a lot older than that child, but I can sure identify with her frustration. It seems like things are changing every day. Things are also changing in our church. This morning I will be exploring what God has for us to learn through all these changes.

1. Generation X

I was at a conference a few years ago and one of the speakers said that the reason traditional churches are shrinking is because we did not pass our faith onto our kids. Some MAY have neglected to do this, but most Christians I know tried their best TO pass on their faith, but the pass was either missed or caught and then fumbled.

This morning I want to look at what is called "Generation X". People in Generation X, nicknamed Gen'Xers, are those born from 1961-1981. This morning I want to focus on this group so we can understand some of the major differences between them and preceding generations who were very committed to traditional churches.

To help, I'll read a poem titled "Life Was Better in Black and White" by Stephen Vaus:

You could hardly see for all the snow
 So you spread the rabbit ears as far as they'd go.
 "Good night David, Good night Chet"
 Pull a chair up to the TV set.

Depending on the channel you tuned,
 You'd get Rob and Laura or Ward and June.
 Andy Griffith and Barney Fife,
 Lawrence Welk or This Your Life.

I Love Lucy and The Real McCoys,
 Dennis the Menace, the Cleaver boys.
 Rawhide, Gunsmoke, Wagon Train,
 Superman and Lois Lane.

Father Knows Best and Patty Duke,
 Rin Tin Tin and Lassie too.
 Donna Reed on Thursday night
 Life looked better in black and white.

They were simple folks living a simple life.
 The good guys always won the fight.
 I wanna' go back to black and white,
 Where everything always turned out right.

In God they trusted, in their own bed they slept,
 A promise made was a promise kept.
 They never cussed or broke a vow,
 They'd never make the network now.

Nowadays nothing's the way it seems,
 In living color or on the screens.
 The good guys don't always win the fight,
 Life doesn't always turn out right.

If only I could, I'd rather be
 In a TV world of '63.
 It felt so good, it felt so right.
 Life looked better in black and white.

I'd trade all the channels on the satellite
 If I could just turn back the clock tonight
 To when everybody knew wrong from right.
 Life was better in black and white.

Why was there such a change in the Gen'Xer generation? Two reasons: They do not know who the characters in the poem are and the world in which THEY grew up, was NOT one in which everybody knew wrong from right. In a couple weeks I will get into why there IS no clear distinction between wrong and right now-a-days. But now I want to give you some of factors that have shaped the Gen X'ers.

2. Factors that shaped Gen X'ers

a. One factor is Sesame Street. Two generations ago there WAS no TV. Last generation, there were cartoons. Gen Xer's grew up watching *Sesame Street* and *Mr. Rogers*. What's so bad about that? ...Nothing. However those programs did something that had never been done before: they combined learning and entertainment.

And once you have learned new things while you are being entertained, you don't want to go back to the old way where the teacher stands up in front of the class and gives a monologue. And it is difficult to sit in a church service where there are no projection screens, no movie clips and no band playing back up for the songs.

b. The Gen X'ers grew up watching TV ads and they wanted good jobs so they could afford these things. When asked why he had been so successful, Steve Jobs, CEO of Apple, said, "I know how to create desire." A lot of Gen X'ers buy the things they desire on credit cards.

c. Gen Xers feel more connected to people in other parts of the world. When previous generations heard of a disaster overseas it was usually a while after the fact and there was no way to respond to the needs of the people involved.

A couple days after the earthquake in Haiti, there were ads where you could send a text message and \$10 would be added to your next bill and that amount would be donated to Haitian aid. Money was coming in at a rate of \$10,000 and hour.

d. 9-11 happened either in Gen X'ers early 20s or early 40s. Those living prior to this event had never experienced an attack on American soil. This left Gen X'ers feeling vulnerable. Now, with terrorist attempts in the news fairly regularly, they feel a sense of national INsecurity that previous generations did not feel.

This sense of insecurity is present in our communities as well. When I was a child, we felt safe outside and we played all day until it was dark. Now the news is filled with random acts of violence. We have had them in our town. Parents are too worried to allow their kids to play outside unsupervised. Our communities, and the world, are scarier places than they used to be.

e. There is also a sense of financial insecurity. Gen X'ers have been told by economists, since they were teens, that Social Security is going broke and the next generation, their generation, is going to have to pay the retirement of their parents. Many believe they will pay into Social security and will get little or nothing out of it when they retire.

Many Gen X'ers believe that their future taxes are going to be a crushing burden. Why? Because of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In WWII, Americans understood the War, they supported the War and they were willing to pay for the War. I have in my hand a booklet titled "War Ration Book No. 3." There are still some ration stamps inside. During WWII you had to have these stamps to buy essential food items. You could not buy a new car or tires for your old car because materials used to make them went to the production of military equipment. Why? To support and to pay for World War II.

How are we paying for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan? We are borrowing billions of dollars a month. As you know, borrowing is great when you buy a home, but you DO have to pay your loans off some day...with interest. Who's going to pay these bills? The Gen X'ers and their children and grandchildren.

Some of us old geezers can point our fingers and say Gen X'ers don't save like we do, but many Gen X'ers believe that what they have will be eaten up by taxes and Social security payments and so they are more likely to just live for the moment rather than save for a rainy day or save for a secure retirement. And they are more likely to support efforts to make the world a better place than pay for church upkeep. And they are more likely to want to be entertained while they worship.

3. The lesson of the Wilderness

So why am I bringing all this up? Partly for information. Partly so that we in other generations can begin to understand, and perhaps empathize, with Gen X'ers. But mostly to help us understand that change is inevitable and, perhaps, WE will be more willing to ACCEPT change in order to accommodate those of younger generations.

I began by reading from the Bible about the Israelites who were wandering in the wilderness after they had left Egypt. There they had had been slaves, forced to make bricks and build monuments for Egyptian nobility. Although they were well fed, the Israelites hated their slavery and were only too glad to follow Moses, leave their shackles behind and seek the freedom that lay ahead.

However, when their supplies ran out, they remembered the pots of meat they used to boil and the abundant bread they used to bake and they longed for the past. At that point in the text, they were even willing to return to slavery so they could eat their fill. So they complained to Moses and, as Moses pointed out, they were REALLY complaining to God. And God heard their complaining and God sent quail and manna.

What POINT was God making? God said, "...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." In Egypt, they trusted in themselves and they trusted the Egyptians to supply their meat and bread. In the wilderness, they had to trust God. And God DID provide for them.

But there WAS a catch. The catch was that while they were in the wilderness they could not use their new freedom to do anything they wanted. God said, "I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not." The reason that they SPENT 40 years in the wilderness was that most of the Israelites wanted to do their OWN thing and they refused to follow the Lord's instructions.

In the past, our church has been fairly secure financially and we have had enough people involved in church leadership and Christian education to keep things running smoothly. Now, we are heading into the wilderness where resources are scarce. The older generation wants to pass on the responsibility for the church to the next generation, but there are not as many of them.

Our tendency may be to wring our hands and look longingly to the past. But God is doing something new. God is saying, "I am testing them, whether they will follow my instruction or not." Many people ARE following God's instruction and ARE getting involved in the ministry and mission of the church.

Many people ARE supporting the church financially. And God thanks you, and so do I. This morning I want to thank each person involved in the chicken BBQ yesterday. This is the first fund raiser of this kind we have had in recent memory. This is a NEW way we were able to raise some money for our ministry and mission.

It has been very difficult to recruit teachers for Sunday school. Most folks find it hard to make a commitment from September through June. Christian Ed. Is now recruiting people to take a class for one month starting in September. If a month is too long, some months only have 3 weeks when Sunday school meets. Please pray to see if you are to be one of those teachers.

We currently need an elder for Finance and one on Church Life.
 We will need elders for Finance and CE to start 1/1/11.
 We will need 2 deacons to start 1/1/11.

When she was the Prime Minister of England, Margaret Thatcher said: "It's nice to think of taking the money for social programs from those who have too much, but you come to the end of those who have too much pretty quickly."

It's nice to think that the time we need for help in the church can come from those who have too much time on their hands, but there ARE no people with extra time. If our church is to continue in the future as it has in the past, we need your help.

Conclusion – "Not with those timid souls"

This is from a speech by Theodore Roosevelt:

It is not the critic who counts; not the one who points out how the strong person stumbled, or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the one who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; Who errs and comes up short again and again; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spend themselves in a worthy cause; who, at the best, know in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who, at the worst, if they fail, at least fail while daring greatly, so that their place shall never be with those timid souls who know neither victory or defeat.

Thank you to those who have served in the arena of life with the Lord. Whose faces are marred with the chalk dust of teaching Sunday school, who have sweated at rummage sales and Washington dinners and who have come home smelling like barbecued chicken, who led youth group, sat through innumerable meetings, sung in the choir, kept track of church finances, come to church and Sunday school when others went to play, and who have given food to hungry people in the summer heat and in the winter cold.

You are those who have the GREAT devotion; who have spent yourself on the worthy cause of faith; who at best have known the triumph of jobs well done and at worse, even if you have failed, have dared greatly for the kingdom of God, so that your place shall never be with those timid souls who know neither victory or defeat, but your place shall be with the Lord, who made heaven and earth, and in whose care you will be in forever and ever and ever. ...Amen.