

Dream Big: Cloudy with a Chance of Quail

COMMUNION

May 4, 2025

Numbers 11:16-32

¹⁶ The Lord said to Moses, “Gather before me seventy men from Israel’s elders, whom you know as elders and officers of the people. Take them to the meeting tent and let them stand there with you. ¹⁷ Then I’ll descend and speak with you there. I’ll take some of the spirit that is on you and place it on them. Then they will carry the burden of the people with you so that you won’t bear it alone. ¹⁸ To the people you will say, ‘Make yourselves holy for tomorrow; then you will eat meat, for you’ve cried in the Lord’s hearing, “Who will give us meat to eat? It was better for us in Egypt.” The Lord will give you meat, and you will eat. ¹⁹ You won’t eat for just one day, or two days, or five days, or ten days, or twenty days, ²⁰ but for a whole month until it comes out of your nostrils and nauseates you. You’ve rejected the Lord who’s been with you and you have cried before him, saying, “Why did we leave Egypt?””

²¹ Moses said, “The people I’m with are six hundred thousand on foot and you’re saying, ‘I will give them meat, and they will eat for a month.’ ²² Can flocks and herds be found and slaughtered for them? Or can all the fish in the sea be found and caught for them?”

²³ The Lord said to Moses, “Is the Lord’s power too weak? Now you will see whether my word will come true for you or not.”

²⁴ So Moses went out and told the people the Lord’s words... ³⁰ Moses and Israel’s elders were assembled in the camp. ³¹ A wind from the Lord blew up and brought quails from the sea. It let them fall by the camp, about a day’s journey all around the camp and about three feet deep on the ground. ³² Then the people arose and gathered the quail all that day, all night, and all the next day. The least collected was ten homers, and they laid them out around the camp.



When Honi drew that first prayer circle in ancient Israel, maybe he felt a little bit foolish. When he stepped inside that circle and demanded rain, it was risky. When Noah began construction on an ark in the middle of the desert, maybe he too felt a little foolish. When he declared that he was building the ark because God instructed him to, well, that was a bit risky in that culture. When Esther prepared to go before the king, telling of an evil plot by the king's most trusted adviser to exterminate her people, she probably felt a bit foolish as she had to reveal her true identity. And, as it was potentially dangerous to go before the king, she was taking a risk. When Peter stood up and prepared to step out of that boat, as his foot neared the waves, maybe he felt a little foolish. When he looked out at Jesus and decided to take that first step, yes, that was risky.

While it is not recorded in the Bible, we just *know* that these people of faith lifted words to God as they moved forward in faith. If you or I were in any of their shoes, we would certainly be lifting our prayers to God. Whether hastily said just before stepping out of our comfort zone or steadfastly offered for three days as she fasted, in their own ways they were circling their needs, worries, cares, concerns... in prayer. As the stories unfold, we see that God heard each prayer and responded to each prayer. These are the stories of faithful people, offering their prayers to God, experiencing the miraculous.

Our main character from our Numbers 11 passage was familiar with looking foolish. That day in Midian, after God first got his attention, how relieved do you think Moses was to look around and see that no one saw him talking to a bush?

Having followed God's directions, how do you think Moses felt, as a nobody standing before Pharaoh, the most powerful person in the world, demanding that he release a million plus slaves? Having led the Israelites out of slavery, now flush up against the sea with the Egyptian army closing in, how do you think he felt in that moment when instructed to just hold up his staff so the sea could part and the people could pass through? Moses had to be willing to look foolish, and he had to be willing to take a risk, in order to see and experience the miracle.

Drawing prayer circles can feel foolish. Going to God with that really big prayer can feel risky. Claiming that promise and being willing to stand on it or to draw a circle and to stand inside it, well, to do so can involve feeling foolish and it can call upon us to take a risk. If we are not willing to claim the promise and to lift the prayers, then we will not experience the miracle or movement of God. Throughout the Biblical account, the willingness to risk and to possibly look foolish, resulted in miracle after miracle. It was not just Noah, Esther, Peter, and Moses. If the wise men never left the Far East, if David never gathered those five smooth stones, if Elijah had not built that altar on Mount Carmel, none would have experienced God in the miraculous ways that they did.

The greatest stories in the Bible and even in life almost always begin with risk, which opens the door to looking foolish. The same is true for the chapters in our lives and in the life of the church. Unless we are willing to risk and are willing to maybe look foolish, then we will likely not be a part of a miracle or of a great movement of God in our lives or in the church. Moses had learned this lesson the hard way: if you don't take the risk, you forfeit the miracle. He regretted the times that he did not trust God or God's promises. The same is true for us.

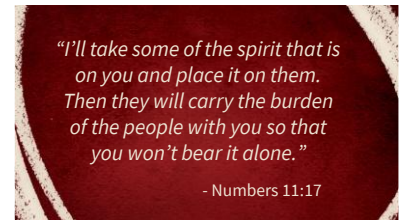
Again and again, through experience, Moses learned that God is trustworthy. Again and again, as Moses stepped out in faith, God moved in amazing ways. The same can all be true for us. As we prepare to explore these ideas this morning, let us pray...

As we turn to Numbers 11, a little background to set the stage. As summarized earlier, Moses was a man familiar with risk. He had a willingness to appear foolish. And he was a man well-versed in God's miracles. In Egypt, he witnessed God's angel of death passing over their homes, leading to the freeing of the Israelites from slavery. In the desert, he witnessed the sea parting so that they could pass through and he saw that same sea close in over their enemies. In the wilderness, he heard God promise to respond to the people's grumbling about their hunger and he witnessed God providing manna in the desert. Again and again, Moses prayed, again and again God answered. In a general sense, the same is true for us. As we mature in our faith, as we experience God moving in our lives again and again, we come to trust a little more, to hold to a belief that is a little stronger, to dream and pray a little bigger.

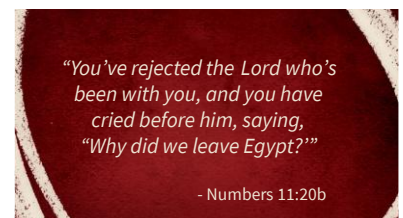
Leading into our passage for today, the Israelites begin to grumble once again. A group of "*riffraff*" ask the question: "*Who will give us meat?*" They are tired of the manna – the miracle food that God had provided, the food that appeared every morning so that they could eat. They remember and long for the free fish and other foods that they had eaten in Egypt. Yes, the food was free, but they were not. While we may scoff at these Israelites complaining about one miracle as they sought another miracle, the reality is that we can do the same. We can find something to complain about when life is blessed and when God is walking daily with us.

Moses hears these grumblings and is upset. God is upset too, but Moses is nearly to the end of his rope. For Moses this feels like one complaint too far over the line. He questions God's decision to place him in this leadership role. Moses feels the burden of leading these people is too much for him to bear any longer. He asks God why he is being treated so badly by God. In verse 15 Moses says to God, *"If you are going to treat me like this, please kill me."* After seeing God at work in so many miraculous ways, Moses has lost his faith and trust in God. As our passage begins, it is not the people's grumbling that God first addresses. It is Moses' lack of faith and trust that God first addresses.

God directs Moses to gather 70 elders, men that Moses sees as leaders amongst the people. Gathered together at the tent of meeting, God says to Moses, *"I'll take some of the spirit that is on you and place it on them. Then they will carry the burden of the people with you so that you won't bear it alone."* God has heard Moses' personal complaint and God has addressed the complaint. Moses will not bear the task of leadership alone. God then addresses the people's grumbling, the corporate complaint.

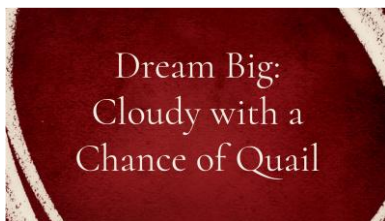


In verses 18-20, God basically says, 'You want meat, I'll give you meat.' God instructs Moses to tell the people to make themselves holy tomorrow because then they will eat meat. God has heard their crying and their talk about life being better in Egypt. In response, God will not provide meat for a day or two or even for 10 or 20 days. No, God says, *"for a whole month until it comes out of your nostrils and nauseates you."* Why? Why such an extreme response? It is because *"You've rejected the Lord who's been with you and you have cried before him, saying, 'Why did we leave Egypt?'"*



The Israelites are questioning God's plan for them. They are questioning God's love and care. They are rejecting how God is working out the promise for God's people to enter the Promised Land.

In verse 21 it is Moses' turn to question God's plan. After all of the miracles that Moses has seen, he says to God, 'Umm... there are 600,000 of us men here and you are saying that you'll give us and all the women and children meat for a month?' Moses ponders where these flocks or herds can be found. He wonders if all of the fish in the sea can be caught. Talk about rejecting the Lord. Well, we do this too. At least I do. I question if God is really big enough to do what God says God will do. In my finite mind I cannot always wrap my head around God's plans some of the time, so I dismiss the possibility. Have you ever done that?



I started volunteering with the youth program at First United Methodist Church in Rapid City in about 2006. Leading Sunday school felt like an extension of my teaching career.

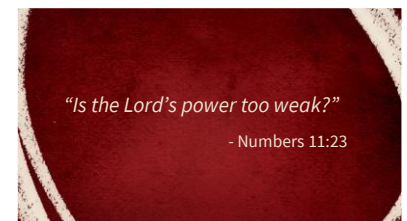
Coincidentally, a young man who would grow into Pastor Karl Kroger was in that group of middle school students. What started out as teaching high school and then middle school Sunday school led to volunteering in the Youth program. Towards the end of the 2009-2010 school year, the church was again searching for the next youth director.

I felt the nudge of the Holy Spirit. I began to pray, to talk to God. Feeling led, I applied. At that point I had been teaching and coaching for about 21 years. It was a step of faith, yes, but it did not involve much risk.

Outside of the pastor and staff parish team and my family, no one knew that I had applied. So there was a minimal possibility of looking foolish. In the end, I was hired as the next youth director and started in the Fall of 2010.

Over the next two years, as I led the youth program, I began to feel another nudge. It felt right to be at the church and to be serving God in that role. This nudge, however, required more serious prayer. This wrestling involved a lot more conversations with God. I knew the promises of God. My struggle was whether or not they all applied to me. Like Moses, I was questioning God. Like Israel, I was questioning God's love and care.

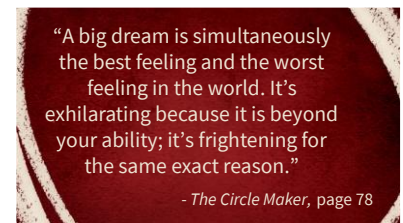
For Moses, there were practical reasons to question God. They were in the middle of the Paran Desert at this point. They were 50 miles from water with nothing but sand all around. It was a long way to go to get fish and even longer to find any sizeable herds, never mind one large enough to feed about a million people – for a month! For Moses, this just didn't add up. It was then that God asked the question: *"Is the Lord's power too weak?"* God was asking Moses if he doubted God's ability to feed the Israelites.



This is really the question that I was struggling with back in early 2012. I was considering responding to a call that would require a pay cut just as our first child was about to enter college. I was questioning God's ability to provide for my family. I was questioning if God's power was sufficient and trustworthy.

The obvious answer to this question is ‘no.’ Yet, in the moments when we are invited to trust God, to bring our problems to God, to respond to a call that God has placed upon our hearts, we can act as if the barriers, problems, obstacles, or whatever are bigger than God. When we struggle with a call from God or with any situation that demands that we depend on God, we’re really wrestling with the question of what is bigger: God or our situation, problem, obstacle? At that place where faith and doubt intersect, we must make a decision. To choose to lean into or onto God, to surrender to God, to depend on God, it can be scary. It can involve risk.

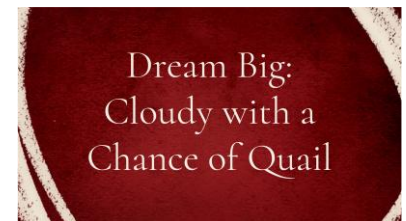
A major reason that I, and maybe you, struggle to surrender to God is that it removes the control from our hands. To surrender says to God, your dream will be my dream. We so want to say ‘yes’ to God, but we can have a hard time coming to that place. Speaking to this moment of decision, Mark Batterson writes on page 78, “A



big dream is simultaneously the best feeling and the worst feeling in the world. It's exhilarating because it is beyond your ability; it's frightening for the same exact reason." How true, how true.

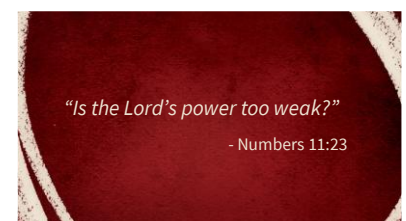
Returning to the story, Moses had a decision to make. Was he going to live into the correct answer to God's question about God's power, or was he going to do something else? There was the practicality of it all, the impossibility of it all. Yet, in faith, throwing all of his credibility, all of himself into God's plan, Moses decides to trust God's promise. Moses shares God's plan with the seventy elders. There, he said it. Jumping to verse 30, we see what happened next.

A wind came up and brought quail from the sea. Quail naturally live by the water, which was at least 50 miles from the Paran Desert. The quail arrived in huge numbers, spread over a large area. In verse 31 we read that the quail fell in a circle that was day's walk from the camp. That would be a circle about 15 miles in all directions. In that same verse we read that the quail were three feet deep. Just to gain some perspective on the sheer volume that God provided, Mark Batterson does the math for us. That circle 30 miles across – that is 10 times the size of Washington, DC. The quail fell three feet deep. The ten homers of quail that each male collected – all together, that works out to about 105 million quail. God's answer to the people's grumbling and to Moses' prayer for the people – it was unpredictable, unexpected, and unprecedented. Moses was willing to speak God's promise to the people. And God provided. As Batterson notes, it's always cloudy with a chance of quail.



In early 2012, I finally began to voice what I was feeling. Claiming the promise that God had good plans for me, trusting that God's Spirit was speaking into my heart, I began to say it out loud to the people who were closest to me. Like Moses, I chose to trust God. Kristin, Pastor Doug, and a few others offered words of support and encouragement. After some more prayer, the decision was made to leave teaching and to enter into full-time ministry. As only God can orchestrate, things fell into place. By July, having worked through the necessary steps, I was appointed as the Associate Pastor at Rapid City First.

To get to that point, I had to decide on my answer to this question: *"Is the Lord's power too weak?"* Through prayer and Christian conversation, and some more prayer, I came to believe that God's power was more than enough.



Looking back, it is clear to me that following my big dream, circling it in prayer, and leaning into God's guidance and direction, has led to some amazing experiences of God's power, presence, and love. It was a choice. I could have refused to trust, pretended not to hear the call, thought God too small to work out this change in my life and in my family's lives. Reflecting on who and what I had known God to be, I chose surrender and trust.

On page 74 in *The Circle Maker*, Mark Batterson relays a story about a man who was trying to size up God. That's what we are doing when we are deciding to trust or not. It is what we are doing when deciding whether or not to surrender to God's promises. In the story, the man began by asking God, "God, how long is a million years to you?" God said, "A million years is like a second." Then the man asked, "God, how much is a million dollars to you?" God said, "A million dollars is like a penny." The man smiled and said, "Can you spare a penny?" God smiled back and said, "Sure, just wait a second."

Sometimes we, in our own way, do the same thing. We size up God. We allow our idea of how big or small God is to determine the size or limits of our prayers. With God there is no big or small, no possible or impossible, no easy or difficult. With God, the question is never "Can He?" but "Will he?" While we do not always know if God will, we know that God can. So, may we ever pray with a holy confidence, knowing the answer to the question God asked Moses: "*Is the Lord's power too weak?*"

Let us pray... Lord God, you call us beyond our vision, dreams, and plans into your bigger, better, larger vision, dreams, promises, and plans. This week, pry open our limits, break down our barriers. This week, bust wide open our courage, trust, and faith. Begin to grow those seeds that you have planted in our hearts and minds. Lead and guide Grace and each of us to bring your light and love to the world. Amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. How or where can you feel God stirring in your heart? What promise is God leading you to claim for yourself or for our church?
- 2) *Pray*. Dare to put your answer(s) to GPS #1 to the test. Take it to God in prayer, entering that exhilarating yet frightening place where God goes to work.
- 3) *Study*. Read Numbers 11:33-34. What word of warning is there in these verses for us and for our church when we decide to ignore or even go against the vision, dream, or promise that God has placed upon our hearts and minds?