

Manna Mañana

Exodus 16:2-15

Sunday, September 27, 2020, Aledo UMC

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Old Testament Lesson, Exodus 16:2-15

² In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. ³ The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the LORD’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.”

⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, “I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. ⁵ On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days.”

⁶ So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “In the evening you will know that it was the LORD who brought you out of Egypt, ⁷ and in the morning, you will see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?” ⁸ Moses also said, “You will know that it was the LORD when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the LORD.”

⁹ Then Moses told Aaron, “Say to the entire Israelite community, ‘Come before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling.’”

¹⁰ While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the LORD appearing in the cloud.

¹¹ The LORD said to Moses, ¹² “I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, ‘At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning, you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.’”

¹³ That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning, there was a layer of dew around the camp. ¹⁴ When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. ¹⁵ When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was.

Moses said to them, “It is the bread the LORD has given you to eat.

Sermon, “Manna Mañana”

A certain man was once described as having an even disposition: “He’s *always* complaining!”

The same could be said of the Israelites. The complaints of the Israelites stand out in today’s Old Testament lesson. (You may have also noticed the complaining of the chief priests and elders in today’s Gospel lesson).

What’s wrong with complaining? For one thing, it undermines faith in God. It says, “What’s wrong with God? Can’t he take care of us?” Israel complained, concluding that God had delivered them only to kill them in the desert. Their perceptions, however, did

not correspond with their new reality: God had just delivered them from a very bitter slavery! In fact, if you look back to Exodus 3, you discover that God delivered them because he heard their complaints in Egypt! Then, not only did God deliver them, he also had a promised land waiting for them! The reality was that they were being transformed from slaves into a nation—and that was critical.

When you come right down to it, though, we can't really blame the Israelites for complaining, can we? Haven't you ever gone on a long trip with your children only to have them complain every half hour that they were hungry?

Last week we heard some news about the needs of our community food pantry: needs for food; needs which need to be met. After all, **our mission is to connect people to Jesus Christ**. Quite frankly, it's hard for a person to connect to Christ when they haven't met their basic needs for food, water and shelter. That's why our church supports our local food pantry. That's why we operated our Caring Hearts and Helping Hands ministries: our hope is if we can meet the most rudimentary of human needs, then perhaps those who have received help will be able to focus on higher needs, and put their trust in Christ and have their spiritual needs met.

What Israel failed to grasp was that God was operating on a different agenda. Yes, God wanted to meet their basic needs, but God was also focused on their higher needs: God wanted to form Israel into a faith-based nation. So he tested them.

Now we're troubled by the notion of God testing us and I think that's because tests carry a negative connotation in our society: ask any teacher and she will tell you that whenever she announces a test, the class groans in complaint. Rarely do they hear the students lift up a cheer: "Hooray! Now we have an opportunity to prove ourselves."

Hear the word of the Lord: in verse 4 the Lord said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in the law or not."

In the Bible, tests are opportunities or occasions in which one can see God come through in one's life. Tests have the purpose of building one's faith, not tearing it down.

The test was that manna was given every day. In other words, the manna was not the final exam; it was the course itself.

How? Because the manna was given every day and only enough manna was to be gathered for the day's needs. God wanted to discipline the Hebrews to trust him each and every day for their daily needs. God could have provided the manna just once; God could have given the Israelites everything they needed for their wilderness wandering.

But he didn't. Instead, God gave only enough for the day and the Israelites were forced to trust God "to give us this day our daily bread."

Many believe that famous line given to us in the Lord's Prayer harkens directly back to Israel's manna in the wilderness. The purpose behind the manna was to teach us to trust God each and every day.

Recently I read the story of a single mother who had just taken a new job and had only been on that job for a month when she was taken ill. With no sick leave and no savings, she was in crises because she would be without income for two weeks.

A local minister heard of her plight and gave her \$250 out of a benevolence fund.

Tears of gratitude rolled down her cheeks as she accepted the gift. "It's manna from heaven," she said. "The Lord provides."

In Exodus 16 we read that not only did the Lord provide manna in morning, but also quail at the time of the evening meal: (I suspect they were attracted to the leftover bits of manna lying on the ground.)

There's an important dimension to the manna: it was given only on the first six days of the week. If the Hebrews collected too much, it would be rotten by the second day. However, on the sixth day the Hebrews were to collect twice as much manna so they would have enough for the Sabbath without working on the Sabbath. And of course, on the second day, the Sabbath, the bread was just fine: God's provision also provided for his people to "remember the Sabbath and keep it holy."

By the time Jesus walked among us, the Pharisees had so abused the Sabbath day that it was the only commandment which Jesus did not reinforce. For example, Jesus reinforced the commandment, "thou shalt not kill," by stating "thou shalt not hate. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer."

Likewise, Jesus reinforced the commandment, "thou shalt not commit adultery" by stating, "if you so much as look at someone lustfully, you have committed adultery."

But Jesus never reinforced the remembrance of the Sabbath. Indeed, it seemed as though he broke the Sabbath by healing and eating. What the religious leaders of his day didn't realize is that by healing and eating on the Sabbath, Christ was actually keeping Sabbath.

The command remains for us today. And Exodus 16 invites us to ask ourselves, "Are we faithfully observing our Sabbath in a way that would please Christ Jesus?"

In Exodus 16, God rained bread down on the Hebrews. Have you ever wondered why? I believe it's because God loves and God loved the Hebrews. Think of a

Christmas gift you've given to someone—you could hardly wait for him or her to open it. You were as excited to give it as she or he was to receive it.

That's the dynamic I see in Exodus 16: God gives because God loves. And he loves because he loves to be loved. The ongoing expressions of his love call forth our love and that makes the heart of God happy.

That's part of the reason he provides for us "fresh every morning." He does it because he loves us and he loves it when we love him. *Infinite love loves infinitely to be loved*. He does it for his own sake. But more, he does it for our sakes, that we may know the peace and strength that come from continual dependence upon him.

The story of manna in the wilderness became made such an impact on the history of Israel that a rabbinical tradition arose that when Messiah came, he would replicate the miracle of manna.

Thus you can imagine the buzz of excitement Christ created when he fed the multitude with just a few loaves and fishes. No doubt that's why the next day, the crowds followed him and began hounding him for more food. After all, the manna given in Moses' day was a daily occurrence and if Christ was the Messiah, he, too, should have multiplied food to them every day.

Christ's response? "I am the bread of life. Don't look for food which perishes—like the manna of the wilderness which was rotten a day or two later. Rather, eat the bread which lasts, the bread which will satisfy you forever."

No wonder when Christ wanted us to remember his saving sacrifice at Calvary, he used bread. And wine.

God loves and because he loves, he provides. And because he provides, we can pray in confidence, "Give us this day our daily bread." God has provided the Living Bread of Jesus Christ "for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.