

Sermon Text – Sunday, August 31, 2025 – Pastor Paula Kraus

1st Reading: Deuteronomy 8:1-6; 2nd Reading: John 6:25-35
Scripture for Message: Exodus 16:2-31 “Enough”

There are so many symbols and symbolic references in our scriptures – some we understand and others we might not. Today I want to talk about Manna. What is manna? Manna sounds like the Hebrew word for “what is it?” and that is probably where the name of this substance originated. According to scriptures, manna is the food God provided for the Hebrews in the wilderness, the food that rained down from heaven. It was found each morning on the ground and is described in Exodus as “thin flakes like frost on the ground” also “like coriander seed and tasting like wafers made with honey.”

The Israelites were told to gather as much as they needed for that day an Omer which is about three pounds – their daily bread. No one was to keep any of it until morning. When the sun grew hot the manna melted. On the sixth day, they were to gather twice as much and keep it overnight so they would have manna to eat on the Sabbath. Some of them – failing to trust – tried to ‘hoard’ the manna to have extra on the next day, maybe they wanted to sleep in, but the next morning it was rotted with maggots. However, that manna gathered on the sixth day was still miraculously fresh on the morning of the Sabbath.

According to our scripture reading, God heard the grumbling of the people and was faithful in providing for their needs. When they were thirsty God provided the means for them to have water. When they were hungry God provided not only manna in the morning, but also quail for their meat in the evenings. The daily gathering of manna underscored the Israelites need for daily reliance on God – it was also, according to Exodus, God’s way of testing the peoples’ faith and to see if they would obey God’s commands.

This ‘manna’ story in Exodus is about much more than God keeping the people from starvation. It is about God’s character, God’s faithful provision for the peoples’ needs, and about the importance of faith, trust, and obedience to God’s instructions. The manna story also provides the basis for the symbolism in the New Testament from John’s Gospel where Jesus refers to himself as the “bread of life” drawing a parallel to the manna as spiritual sustenance.

We have read from the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy that God “humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.”

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Manna was the food that nourished their bodies but the provision of manna from the Lord and the lessons that came to the people through the manna was their spiritual food. Manna taught the people they could trust and rely on God to provide for their needs. Manna taught the people that each person would have enough to supply their needs – no more no less, the ones who thought they could gain something found that hoarding would not work.

We have learned that the people of Israel wandered for forty years in the wilderness. During that time, their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell – that's truly a miracle. You would think in that forty years the people would learn where their 'bread' came from and would learn to believe God's promises. You would think that forty years would be enough time for them to learn manna's lessons of justice and equal distribution of resources – because that is what the provision of manna in the wilderness would teach them. You would think that forty years would be enough time for them to learn that reliance on God was beneficial to them. Of course, we know that they did not learn, and a lot of the Old Testament prophets tell us how God continually waited for them to turn to God and for them to trust in God and for them to walk in obedience to God.

The lessons from the story of manna are lessons that continue to teach us today. First is the lesson of God's provision. Manna serves as a tangible demonstration of God's faithfulness in providing for the people's needs. God did not turn away from the cries of the people – even though their grumbling provoked God's anger. What God did for God's people centuries ago God will do for God's people even today. God asks for our trust in God's promises and what Jesus says, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry." The Israelites had forty years to learn to depend on God – we've had centuries since to learn that God will never leave us and will never forsake us. Some of us however still struggle with trust and still struggle to believe what God promises – we are human however and God waits.

The promise of God's provision also teaches us to depend on God. The Israelites were taught to gather the manna daily – just enough for each day and double for the sabbath. The daily gathering of manna stressed the need for daily reliance on God. A few weeks ago, we read from Luke's Gospel where Jesus taught his disciples to pray. When we recite the Lord's prayer we ask for our daily bread – I wonder if that is the lesson learned from gathering manna. Our daily bread is a symbol of enough – enough for this day and a reminder to worry

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about tomorrow later. In the gathering of manna each got just enough, some gathered much, and some gathered little but when everything was weighed out – each had enough. This was unsurpassed economic justice – no one was “richer” than another, each person was worthy of enough – their daily bread. God’s plan is for justice and equity, that each should have enough. We should learn the lesson that provided the world’s goal is for the equal distribution of resources there is enough for everyone. Provided that our goal is to fully rely on God and trust God enough to wait for God’s provisions we will know that there is enough for everyone.

Now I can’t say that I even fully rely on God in all things – we live in a world that tries to convince us there isn’t enough so we must gather and “build bigger barns” to hold our bounty. In our culture we are inundated with advertising that confuses needs with desires, telling us you must have this, or your life will be incomplete. So, people fall into a trap of going into debt to provide for themselves the material things they believe they need. The lesson for us is to rely on God to supply our needs, rely on God for our daily bread. That is difficult for humans because we believe in freedom and the right to make our own choices. Trust that God’s desire is for each of God’s children to have enough.

Together with trust, the story of manna is also a reminder that God tested the Israelites to see if they would obey his commands regarding the manna. God tested their faith – their trust and obedience. Faith in God is important – was important for the Israelites who had to rely on God as they wandered in the wilderness – but is also important in our daily walk. Why is faith important? It is faith, not need, doubt, or fear, which moves God to act. As Christians we pray for God to provide our daily bread, to heal our bodies or our relationships and to give us wisdom, courage, and strength. But asking in faith increases the likelihood that we become aware of God’s response to our petitions. In addition, faith in God is our shield against evil. Faith helps us remain strong when we face difficulties – and we will face difficulties because we live in a sinful, fallen world. Furthermore, our faith in God drives how we live our lives. We must be prepared to fight to maintain our faith during the storms of life which try to derail us. In fact, as we preserve our faith in God, it will sustain us through the toughest trials, for the glory of God.

Equally important as faith and trust, the manna story in Exodus gives us the basis of Jesus’ statement in John’s Gospel – I am the bread of life. This bread from heaven is the bread that gives life to the world. Jesus followers, those who were

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fed from the five loaves and two fishes, asked Jesus “What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our ancestors ate manna in the wilderness; as it is written ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” Jesus himself is the bread that came down from heaven giving life to the world – Jesus is the “bread” sent from God, the true bread from heaven. It is Jesus who provides the spiritual sustenance needed for our lives – food that endures to eternal life.

Finally, what does all of this mean for the church and for the individuals in it? Manna is one symbol of God’s kingdom and the story from Exodus illustrates for us how to live in God’s kingdom according to God’s will. We learn from the experiences of the Israelites’ wandering for those forty years how God provides and is faithful to the covenant. Because we have the record of their lives and deeds recorded in the Hebrew Bible, our Old Testament, we can learn how God guided them and instructed them. Not only can we learn from the mistakes they made and the consequences they faced but we can also learn how God was with them through all their trials and tribulations. God never abandoned God’s people.

What God asked of God’s people during that time God asks of God’s people even now. This manna story reminds us that God will provide if we trust God enough to wait for God’s provisions. It teaches us that God gives enough for everyone, but it is the duty of God’s chosen people, the church, to ensure that God’s provisions reach everyone. This story of manna teaches equitable distribution of resources, it teaches reliance on God for our sustenance, and it teaches that we do not live on “bread” alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.