

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost  
August 5, 2018

Text: Exodus 16:2-15  
Theme: “Bread Storm”

Manna, “what is it?” is exactly what it is. “What is it?” was the response of the children of Israel when they first saw it there on the wilderness floor. In our text it is described as “fine as frost on the ground.” That could also be translated “thin” instead of fine. When we see the word “fine” we think of small particles like that in flour. “Thin” fits better with “flake-like.” In verse 31 we read of manna that it was like coriander seed, white, and tasted like waters made with honey. But just what this what is it was remains a mystery.

Well, fret no longer, I just happen to know the secret (no, not really). The thin and flake-like tipped me off. It must have been rolled oats, like this. And you can bake it into a loaf like this. It’s easy to do. It must be because I did it. But it doesn’t taste like wafers made with honey. So, just pour honey on it and you’re in business.

Obviously I don’t really know the secret to manna. Manna remains a mystery, but, oh, it was quite the miracle, God’s providing for His people, daily bread daily for 40 years. “Give us this day our daily bread,” we do pray. And we read in *The Small Catechism*, “God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people, but we pray in this petition that God would lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.”

God does rain down His provision. He tells Israel, “I am about to rain bread from heaven for you.” So He did, so He has, and so He will. But God’s rain is not always met with thanksgiving. Instead there may be a reign of doubt about God’s rain.

There could be doubt when there seems to be a lot raining on our parade. Quite a cloud of doubt was steaming up from the hearts of the sons of Israel. This was not long after leaving Egypt. Verse 1 of this chapter tells us that it is the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the second month after departing Egypt. They find themselves in the Wilderness of Sin with no food in sight. It's only been six weeks out of Egypt, but a lot has happened in those six weeks. There was that little event at the Red Sea when it looked like they were at a dead end at the edge of the sea. But God turned the tables and it was the death of those seeking their death. Then there was that lesser known event of the bitter waters being made sweet (Exodus 15:22-27). And of course there was those amazing events in Egypt that led to their coming out.

In the Wilderness of Sin—no food—sin breaks out in Sin, grumbling, grumbling against Moses and Aaron. “Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us into this wilderness to kill the whole assembly with hunger.” (vs 3) These words were certainly not a testimony to God's faithfulness, this better off full and dead in Egypt than hungry and alive in the wilderness. No, they were not receiving their daily bread with thanksgiving in this fog of doubt hovering over Sin.

How's the weather for us these days? “It's great, everyone is healthy and getting along. Daily bread is not an issue; the bins are full. You might even say I am feeling my oats these days.” We know such days and we can rejoice in them giving thanks. But maybe it's not so wonderful right now. It appears famine is raining and fear is in the forecast. The financial forecast is not all that sunny, no, it's windy, even a hot, dry wind. Or it could be stormy, storms have taken a few things away, or maybe there has been more of a slow drain. It's more like a slow leak in a tire. We just don't know how much farther

we can go. All this could be in our personal lives concerning health and job, marriage and family. We may be feeling a few clouds hanging over us as a congregation and over our school. And we worry. What is there is not enough of what we need? What if there is too much for us to handle?

We don't always have the view in front of us we would like. We would like to see this big bowl of oats on the shelf right now, but instead we see these little cups and as we look down the line we see some empties, currently at least, just what about those? We can see today, tomorrow, the day after that, but then what? Lean times ahead, or lean times now, how will we do this? It robs us of our sleep, could even steal our sanity.

There is doubt about not enough, there is doubt also that God is just not doing it right, not to our tastes at least. Life is not as smooth or as fun as we would. Maybe monogamy is getting monotonous. Surely God would not want me to be unhappy. It could be what I have is good, but you know, it's not enough, never enough. Why can't I have more, or at least as much as those around me?

God provided for Israel day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year. A remarkable thing was happening. Food was always there, always. They did not have to plant or cultivate or harvest. They didn't have to battle pests and worry about drought. The food was right there for the gathering. No other peoples on earth had ever before (or has ever since) had such an experience. And how do the people of Israel respond? After a while the response from some was, 'we're tired of this stuff!' (Numbers 11:6, 21:5)

Israel's reign of doubt was reflected in their test scores. Some did not do well on the manna quiz. God said, "I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will

walk in my law or not.” (vs 4) Later in this chapter we learn they were told not to leave any out overnight. Some did and it bred worms and stank (vs 19, 20). They were told to gather twice as much on the 6<sup>th</sup> day as there would be none to gather on the 7<sup>th</sup> day. Yet some go out on the 7<sup>th</sup> day and instead of “what is it,” it is “where is it?” God says to all this, “How long will you refuse to keep my commandments?” (vs 27-28)

Israel was good (or bad about) testing the Tester. Soon they would grumble about lack of water, they would construct and dance around the golden calf, complain about the food, Aaron and Miriam would challenge Moses’ authority, yet God still provides and protects. So they make their way to Canaan and are in position to enter, the very thing God has brought them out of Egypt for. But they refuse. God says, “None of the men who have seen my glory and my signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have tested me these ten times, shall see the land I swore to give to their fathers.” (Numbers 14:22-23)

How well do we score on the tests of life? Are there a lot of red marks? Do they reflect generous hearts or miserly hands, words of thanksgiving or the murmuring of complaint, the path walked in the light of our Lord’s commandments or the meandering from the signals of a defective and sinful heart?

Yet God reigns. His is a reign of patience and steadfast love. Despite the poor test scores the manna continued to be there. God did provide the meat of quail at the time of our text, and would send another downpour of that feathered feast on at least one other occasion. At the time of the people’s rebellion of refusing to enter the promised land Moses reflected back to God what God have revealed to him earlier, “The LORD is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but He will

be no means clear the guilty---please pardon the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Your steadfast love.” (Numbers 14:18-19)

The reign of God’s promise would continue from that steadfast love. He was at work to bring to fruition the promise of the Seed of the woman, the offspring of Abraham, the Prophet like unto Moses, and the Son of David. The cloud of doubt never stopped the rain of God’s promise. God is always faithful.

God said He was about to rain down bread and He did. In our lesson from John those who sought out and found Jesus said, “Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” (John 6:31) Jesus points them to the raining of a much greater Bread. “Truly, truly, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” (vs 32, 33) He also says, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.” (vs 35)

God sends heavenly rain that brings heaven’s reign. It is not a thin, flake-like bread spread out to be gathered from the wilderness floor. It is God in the flesh facing temptation, hunger, lack, rejection, ridicule, and always passing the tests. This is the Bread of the One who offers Himself up as the complete and perfect sacrifice for sin. He provides the means for clearing the guilty of guilt. He takes all guilt, like yours and mine upon Himself.

He is the Bread that is taken in, received through faith. It is the miracle of the divine. Jesus says, “This is the work of God that You believe in Him whom He has sent.” (vs 29) Believing itself is the work of God. Faith is given by the Holy Spirit not conjured up the human will. Now believing, and again, God gives the faith that constitutes the believing is

the foundational work of the works that follow, the fruits of faith. This Bread is taken in through our ears believing what we have heard. And we eat it up through our mouths believing our Lord does come to us in His body and blood. Our risen Lord Jesus is at the Father's right hand ruling all for the sake of His body that the reign of heaven may thrive on earth until the day of His return.

Faith has reigned down through times past and will through all time till the end of time. There was rebellion in the wilderness, but not all rebelled. This has always been the case, faith lived out in times of doubt and apostasy. It will be so until our Lord's return. The gates of hell surely will not prevail against the church.

Faith's reign in the lives of the faithful is not showy, but certainly shows. We read in our Epistle lesson, <sup>ESV</sup> **Ephesians 4:1** I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, <sup>2</sup> with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup> eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

God has reigned down bread from heaven, the Bread of Life. He has provided, does provide and will provide. Remember we don't have the perspective nor power of God. We look down the line and we see more empties than we would like. We can't see the provision God has in store. Or maybe we are tired of the taste, yet God nourishes and sustains and we experience the taste of satisfaction that comes with faithfulness.

Jesus is the Bread of Life. We eat, are forgiven, live and serve and as we do we are sources of His reign to those around us. For Jesus' sake. Amen