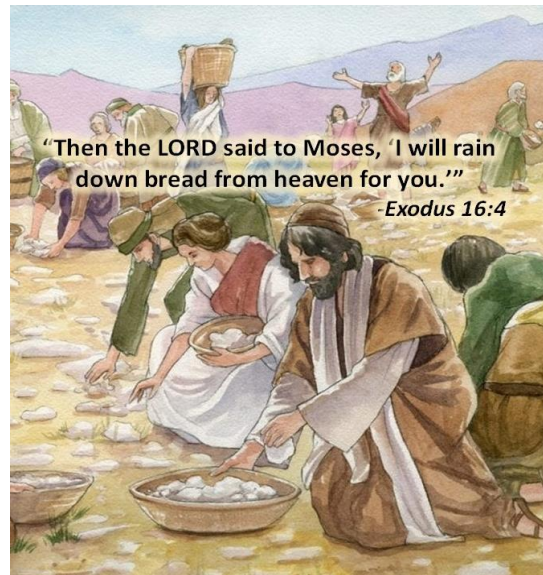


Sermon – September 5, 2021
“Bread from Heaven”
The Rev. John C. Wright



Text: Exodus 16:2-5, 31-35

Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come, Holy Spirit, come, visit, fill our hearts anew this day, and anoint the sharing of these words. Make them to be a blessing for your people, a blessing that leads to life eternal and fruitful labor as we tarry here on this mission field. Lord, come and astonish us with your word this day. Amen

Good morning! It is good to be back with you this morning after a week of vacation. I greatly appreciated the opportunity to rest and to recharge. I want to thank all who helped with worship last week and a special thanks to Judy Mooers for bringing the message.

I hope that we are continuing to read through Exodus and that having a week off has allowed us to catch up to this morning's reading or even to finish reading through Exodus and revisiting these key Old Testament passages. If you are not yet reading through Exodus, let me encourage us to start reading God's word and to begin to allow God's word to speak directly to us through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Let me provide a little background to catch us up to this morning's reading. Israel has left behind the bodies of the army of Egypt on the sea shore and have begun journeying towards the Promised Land through the wilderness. They are not finding their own way in the wilderness, but

are being led by God through God's presence in the pillar of fire at night and the cloud by day. Israel's journey in the wilderness is not just to the land of promise flowing with milk and honey, but they are also finding their way to God. Egypt is behind them and they are free from bondage there. However, they were not freed to follow their own desires but were freed to serve God, a God whom they do not yet know, but will grow to know as they are tested and, through testing, taught who God is and what it means to serve Him.

About a month has passed since Israel left Egypt and the bounty of that land, and from the text they seem to have run out of provisions that they brought along to eat on their journey. They are not starving or yet in danger of starving as they have flocks with them on their journey. But they do seem to be at the point where what they planned to eat has been consumed and, whatever the bounty of Egypt may or not have really been, they now are remembering the good old days of Egypt and what they once had in that place where they sat beside their flesh pots and ate to their fill. They begin to murmur about their situation, placing their memories of Egypt against their perceived lack of abundance in the wilderness and blaming God for their situation. They do not yet realize that God is with them and, that even in the wilderness, the One who creates and sustains watches over them now for good.

The wilderness is always a place for refinement of our understanding of God. The wilderness is the place where God teaches and helps those who will follow Him there to trust Him more deeply. Today, the world is the wilderness that we as followers of Christ are led into for refinement, teaching, and our own development of trust in God. In our wilderness journeys, we are challenged to follow Jesus Christ into his mission to all people. We are to be those who are among the world, but not of the world. We also are to grow from our time in the world and are to always be the light of Christ to those in darkness there.

Notice God does not respond with retribution or judgement to Israel's murmuring. Instead, God provides for them. With God, the wilderness becomes not a harsh place of scarcity, but a place where God's love is demonstrated and His nature is revealed. Israel must learn to trust and obediently follow God. God will provide in this place of scarcity an abundance of food on a daily basis. Israel must go, find this provision, gather it as instructed, and prepare it for their food.

Notice the words used by God as He tells Israel about their new provisions, starting in verse 4, "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. On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days.” Don’t miss that God will rain bread from heaven for Israel. In the plagues of Egypt, God rained hail from heaven on Egypt for their destruction, but in the wilderness, God rains bread on Israel for their benefit, that they may have daily bread. As we pray the Lord’s Prayer, we should be reminded of our own request in that prayer for daily bread and seek to be those who are daily relying on God to provide for our own needs with grateful hearts. God is not present only for the big moments in life such as stopping Pharaoh’s army, but is also concerned about our own small daily needs and will make provision for them. Our God is a God who loves His people in the great and the small.

With the coming of morning, the Israelites see the bread from heaven on the ground and they ask “What is this?” In Hebrew the sound of this spoken question is very close to the sound of the word “manna.” The word we use for the bread from heaven is basically this idea of, what is this that God has given? As the people begin to go and gather this gift from God, they find manna is food with very special properties. Manna has a good taste for all who eat it. This is not one of the frustrating Communion wafers that we are using during Communion or some airy tasteless rice cake in need of added flavor. This is good tasting food. Manna cannot be kept overnight or it will spoil and grow worms. It must be gathered daily. No matter how much or little one gathers, it is only enough for each person for the day, an omer. No matter the amount gathered when measured, it provides what is needed for one’s daily requirement for sustenance. Notice that once the sun is high in the sky the manna melts and is gone. One must seek daily bread early in the day and not wait as it will be gone, and those who have waited will suffer need and will be hungry. Perhaps one of the most interesting attributes is that on the sixth day when they gather this gift, they gather twice as much, enough for two days, and that some of what is gathered on the sixth day may be kept over for the seventh day. That which is kept over on the sixth day does not spoil but provides for the seventh day’s food. Finally, notice that on the seventh day there is no bread rained from heaven as God rests on the seventh day and Israel is expected to rest as well. They are not to be hungry as they rest as God has provided for them if they will obey His commands. As God provides bread from heaven to feed Israel, so also Israel begins to learn about God’s love for them and His nature. On the seventh day God rests and His people also are to rest. God’s gifts reflect God’s nature, and Israel learns about God as they

receive bread from heaven. We should also know that this bread from heaven comes for forty years, the entire time Israel is in the wilderness. On the day Israel enters the Promised Land and begins to eat the provisions there, this bread from heaven stops appearing. If we have read ahead in our Bibles or remember Israel's struggle to follow God, we know that those who ate this bread from heaven died in the wilderness. This bread, as wonderful as it was, did not sustain one forever; its sustaining was limited to a day. This bread from heaven's limitation points to something more, a better bread yet to come down from heaven that will sustain God's people. God is in control even in the wilderness times of our lives, and as we journey with God through those times, God brings blessings out of bareness. God brings abundant loving care to His people in all places.

In chapter 6 of John's Gospel, Jesus is engaged with the crowd. In his conversation and teaching with them, Jesus reminds them and us about the coming of a better bread from heaven. In John 6:32-33, Jesus tells the crowd, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." Jesus makes it clear that manna is not true bread from God. There is yet another bread from God that is true bread and this bread will give life. Jesus then tells the crowd. "Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life." Jesus says, "I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die." Jesus then tells the crowd, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." Jesus tells us that he is this true bread that was to come. Jesus is the bread that leads to eternal life and those who believe in him will have eternal life. Jesus makes it clear in his statement to the crowd that he is the true bread of life. He is the only way to eternal life. And Jesus also makes it clear that he will give his flesh for the life of the world.

At the last supper, Jesus takes one of the pieces of unleavened bread, breaks it, and gives it to the apostles, telling them to take, eat, this is my body given for you. Jesus' actions and words point to the giving of his life, his body, his flesh, to be broken and die on a cross as a perfect sacrifice that we might be restored to God and have eternal life. Jesus points us to a new bread that has come down from heaven, Jesus Christ, whose death and resurrection lead through our belief in him to eternal life. This is true bread given for us. The bread that we consume in

Communion is a reminder of Jesus' broken body, the true bread from heaven given for us that we might not die but have eternal life.

Remember, as we approach Communion this morning, the six major ideas found in the New Testament about Communion: thanksgiving, fellowship, remembrance, sacrifice, action of the Holy Spirit, and eschatology, or Christ's future return at the end of the age. Let us remember that we as believers live in the now and not yet of the kingdom of God through the power of the Holy Spirit and Christ's sacrifice for us. Jesus is the true bread and as we approach Communion this morning, let us open our hearts to give thanks for true bread, joining together in the fellowship at Jesus' table where we are reminded of the true bread we have received through belief in Jesus. Let us remember who Jesus is and what this true bread from heaven has given us through his sacrifice. Be open this morning and always to the movement of the Holy Spirit in our lives as we come to Jesus' table. Come expecting his presence there as we gather and look forward to eternal life that has begun now, but has not yet fully come. Let the wafer of bread we eat together this morning remind us of the flesh of Jesus that was sacrificed for us that we might receive eternal life. Let us seek to be filled with the gift of bread from heaven in place of the alluring bread of the world that does not fill but misleads us to fill ourselves with that which is not true bread and which does not bring eternal life.

Pray with me: Lord, we also have been led out into the wilderness to follow you. Open our eyes to who you are that in the bread and the juice of the vine we share this day we might be transformed into your image. Give us this true bread that we might go forth into the wilderness to be with you in your mission to all people. Come, Lord Jesus, come. Amen.