

Theme: Manna from Above

Scripture: *¹⁴When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. ¹⁵When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, 'What is it?' For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, 'It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat. (Exodus 16:14-15)*

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A Note about the Sermon at New Jerusalem on August 5, 2018

The sermon time for this particular Sunday began with a presentation by the participants in New Jerusalem's Vacation Bible School, which was held July 16-20. The theme for this year's VBS was "Shipwrecked: Rescued by Jesus." The children gathered down front and began their presentation by singing the theme song for the week (along with a video of the song). Then a video was shared, showing the children and some of the highlights for the week. After the presentation concluded, Pastor Cindy asked the children to remain down front and continued with a joint children/adult sermon, which is what follows here.

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We've just heard and sung the words from the theme song from this year's VBS, *Shipwrecked: Rescued by Jesus*:

You gave me hope when hope was all but gone,
A second chance to sing a brand new song;
You opened up my eyes to see
When you rescued me (ah, ah), rescued me (ah, ah).

This connects with today's first bible reading from Exodus in which the people of Israel are following Moses out of bondage in Egypt and out into the Sinai wilderness. Except in the Exodus reading, we find the Israelites not shipwrecked on a desert island but wandering in a deserted wilderness. There wasn't much food and the people begin to grumble and complain to Moses that they don't have enough to eat. But God hears their complaining and says to Moses: *"I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people can go out and gather enough for that day."* God reached out (and not for the first time) to rescue the people. The next morning when the people went outside their tents, the ground was covered with a fine, flaky substance. When they saw it, they didn't know what it was and so they asked in their own language, *"Man-hu?"* – which in English means, *"What is it?"*

TO THE CHILDREN: I have something to show you this morning that I doubt any of you have seen before. *(Hold up the covered cake plate with Monkey Bread.)* When you see it, some of you may ask, *"What is it?"* In fact, that's exactly what happened yesterday when my husband saw this sitting on our kitchen counter; he said, *"What is it?"* But this morning when you see it, I want you to say what the Israelites said: *"Man hu?"* Let's practice that: *Man hu? (Have the children practice saying, "man hu?")* Very good.

Are you ready to see what I have here? Okay, here it is. *(Remove the cover.)* What do you say?

Man hu?

That's right! *Man hu? What is it?*

When the Israelites saw what was on the ground, they asked Moses, "*Man hu?*" Moses answered them, "*It is the BREAD that the LORD has given you to eat.*" Because the people asked *man hu?*, the bible has continued to call the bread that God gave to the Israelites "*MANNA.*"

This (*point to the monkey bread*) is a kind of bread too, but it's not the same as the bread God sent to the Israelites – not the same as manna. This particular bread is called monkey bread.¹ I don't really know why it is called monkey bread, but perhaps because you eat it by pulling off and eating it one piece at a time, much the same way that a monkey eats his food. Would you like to try some? It is really good! (*Let all of the children eat a piece.*)

God told the people to gather only enough of the manna bread for one day. Can you guess why he told them that? (*Wait for responses.*) He said that because He wanted them to trust Him to send the bread that they needed each and every day. But some people were not sure they could trust God for the next day's bread so they gathered up much more than they could possibly eat in one day and tried to keep it overnight. Guess what happened. The extra bread they had gathered got all mildewed and wormy – it became so foul they couldn't eat it! You see, God was providing manna for **each** and **every** day. God still provides what we need for each and every day. That is why Jesus taught us to pray, "*Give us this day our **daily** bread*" in the Lord's Prayer. When we pray this, we are praying in expectation that God will provide for us each and every day just as he did for the Israelites out in that desert when he rescued them from hunger.

TO THE ADULTS: While the children finish eating up the monkey bread, a word to you adults about our gospel reading.

First, the experience of the Israelites in the wilderness with manna is key to engaging with today's gospel and the gospel readings for the next several Sundays. For five Sundays in a row, we have gospel readings from John, chapter 6. This series of five began last Sunday when we read the story of Jesus miraculously feeding a crowd of 5,000 with 2 fish and five loaves so that they were *all satisfied*. Afterward, Jesus left the crowd when they wanted to make him a king; his disciples began crossing the sea while he presumably went up the mountain to pray. But then Jesus came walking on the sea as his disciples in the boat were struggling against strong winds. Meanwhile the crowd that had been fed went searching for Jesus. When they couldn't find him, they too got into boats the next day and crossed to the other side of the sea.

Upon finding him in Capernaum, an interesting dialogue begins. The people ask Jesus when he came there. Jesus, in turn, does not answer their question but asserts that they are looking for him, not because they understood the **sign** – the sign, that is, of the feeding of the multitude – but because they had eaten their fill of the loaves! And then Jesus launches into what has come to be known as the great "Bread Discourse," during which Jesus teaches about the significance of the feeding "sign" and about himself. During this discourse, from which our gospel readings for the

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next three Sundays will derive, Jesus will often refer to the wilderness wandering during which God fed the Children of Israel with manna.

According to our Old Testament reading today from Exodus, God tried to remind the people that they were absolutely dependent on God for their **daily** bread. But Jesus will later remind his hearers that their ancestors “*ate the manna in the wilderness and they died.*” It’s as if Jesus is reminding his hearers that yes, God provides for your daily needs, but if you eat only ordinary bread, you’re going to get hungry again, as this kind of bread just doesn’t last. So in today’s gospel, Jesus challenges the people: “*Do not to seek for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you*” (Jn 6:27). Then Jesus proclaims, “*I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry and who ever believes in me will never be thirsty*” (Jn 6:35). We will hear much more about this in the coming weeks.

If the theme of our VBS was that we’re rescued by Jesus, the theme of our gospel lesson today is that Jesus is the only one who can rescue us from our spiritual hunger and thirst. Again, we are rescued by Jesus, by Him who is the “Bread of Life.” For Jesus is the one who can supply our every need.

Prayer: Dear Father, just as you provided daily bread for your children in the time of Moses, you provide for all our needs each and every day. For all of your goodness, we give thanks for Jesus who is our Bread of Life. Amen.

Hymn of the Day: *I Am the Bread of Life* (vss. 1 & 5 only)