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Christ the King & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Cody & Powell, WY

Lent IV – Midweek

March 13, 2024

Text: Exodus 16:2–21

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

On the one hand, I sympathize with the children of Israel. They are a large group of hungry people camped in a desert wilderness. They have little to no food because their departure from Egypt was made in great haste. On the night of the 10th and final plague, they celebrated the Passover with roasted lamb, bitter herbs, and unleavened bread. **While they ate under the cover of lamb's blood posted over the lintels of their doorways, the firstborn of Egypt were being struck down. That dreadful plague finally broke Pharaoh's stubborn heart and he commanded them to leave immediately. The unleavened bread of the Passover was the bread of affliction and haste. That's how Moses described it 40 years later in Deuteronomy 16:3:**

³You shall eat no leavened bread with it (i.e., the Passover lamb). Seven days you shall eat it with unleavened bread, the bread of affliction—for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste...

Once Pharaoh gave the order for Israel to leave, there was little time to prepare adequate provisions for a lengthy journey. And now, the food supplies are running short. What are they to do? Vs. 2–3,

²And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, ³and the people of Israel said to them, “Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”

Their hunger is understandable. But longing for Egypt? Or worst, better to have died in the plagues in Egypt?! That's harder to fathom. It's as if they were saying it would have been better to die in the plagues of Egypt as slaves tied to their dying masters than to live in the adversity and suffering of freedom as God's newborn people.

We dare not romanticize this situation. To die by the hand of the Lord in Egypt meant death by bloody water, frogs, gnats, flies, dying livestock, boils, fiery hail, locusts, darkness, and an inexplicable malady that destroyed all the firstborn. Those were the 10 plagues. Now, the freedom the Lord has promised and won for them looks like a slow death by starvation. Death in slavery, death in freedom. This is the desperate situation Israel is facing less than two months after deliverance from Egyptian bondage. Maybe we can understand, at least to some extent, their grumbling.

The Lord's response to Israel's grumbling is most extraordinary. He answered with patience and fatherly kindness (vs. 12), "And the Lord said to Moses, 'I have heard the grumbling of the people of Israel. Say to them, At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. Then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.'" And the Lord kept His promise. He gave them manna in the morning and quail in the evening.

Manna has a unique place in Biblical history. Each morning the children of Israel were to collect as much manna as they thought they could eat that day. **But in general, each person was to collect an omer of manna, or about 2 liters of manna.** The manna would feed God's people for 40 years in the wilderness journeys. The psalmist Asaph describes the manna as "the grain of heaven" and "the bread of the angels" (Ps. 78:24–25). And the Lord Jesus teaches in John 6 that the manna given through Moses was a prophetic image Himself being the true bread of heaven. Listen to Jesus in John 6:

⁴⁸I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹Your fathers ate manna in the wilderness and they died. ⁵⁰This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹I am the living bread that came down from

heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

Exodus 16 is a prophecy of the Lord Jesus Christ as much as the Passover and Red Sea Deliverance. And we mustn't overlook the fact that when we pray “give us this day our daily bread” we are praying for and living in the pattern of provision the Lord Himself established. For He commanded His people Israel to gather their daily manna, their daily bread.

And yet, Exodus 16 also presents us with a monumental challenge. Shall we long for and go back to the slave-like luxury of worldly ease and comfort? Or shall we walk in the challenge and adversity of freedom as newborn children of God? As you well know, faith in God does not relieve you of adversity and challenge. Even though the children of Israel received their daily bread from God in a most dramatic and miraculous manner, they still had doubts, failures, and sins. God was faithful, kind, and also strict in His discipline. But in the end, He brought His people to the Promised Land.

But shall we continue to look back to the ease and comforts of Egypt or look forward by faith in the coming age of glory not knowing when or how we shall arrive? Shall we walk by faith in the God who is unseen to our human eyes or shall we walk by sight trusting in the dazzling glory of this world?

There is much that calls us back to the land of unbelief, fear, and bondage. So many voices in our day are calling into question the whole idea of faith in God, of organized religion, of transcendent belief. So many doubts about the validity and authority of God's Word for our modern times. And what of our particular fears in our individual lives (money, health, family, country, etc.)? And of our congregations, will they be here to baptize and catechize our grandchildren, etc.? Do we not all feel in our bones that things are changing all around us? The needs of our time require continual repentance and faith; repentance, turning away from sin and unbelief. And faith in Jesus as our Savior who died for our sins, rose from the dead for our eternal life, and gives us the food of eternal life.

Yes, I hear fear on all sides. To all such fears, I say, “By faith in Christ Jesus He provides...by faith in Christ Jesus we will endure and overcome...by faith in Christ Jesus will live now and for eternity!” Christ Jesus and His people – small, unimpressive, and grumbling though we be – are our true treasures. I’m throwing my lot in with Jesus and you, His beloved people.

What some critics and enemies of the Christian Church so easily forget is that we have one greater than even Moses. We have the Lord Jesus Christ, THE very bread from heaven, prepared by God the Father Himself to nourish us and fill us with transcendent joy and peace. This Lord Jesus grabbed Satan, sin, and death in His nail-pierced hands and destroyed them. For Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to the right of the Father. From that throne of glory, He is preparing a glorious inheritance for His children. This is the reward we and all of God’s people see by faith. This faith, that sees past the suffering and uncertainty of this world, is nourished day by day by eating the true manna sent by the Father Himself. The Lord Jesus Christ. By the grace of the Holy Spirit and the love of God the Father almighty, let us eat joyously and heartily upon our daily bread from heaven, our Lord Jesus Christ.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.