

MANNA FROM HEAVEN

John 6:35, 41-51

August 11, 2024

The lectionary texts for the past several weeks have included stories about bread. One can't help but remembering the story of the feeding of the five thousand when you think about bread. Twice now we have read the Old Testament stories about manna coming down from heaven to feed the Israelites during their years in the wilderness. In fact, it was while still trying to comprehend what Jesus had done feeding five thousand people with five loaves of bread that they brought up the story of the manna from heaven. We read in last week's lesson: "Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" (John 6:31) I can almost hear the disciples asking: "Is what you just did another manna-from-heaven event?" And what does Jesus say next: "You guys are thinking about filling your stomachs; my mission is far greater than that. I AM God's 'manna from heaven', I AM the 'bread of life.' I came down from heaven, not to fill stomachs, but to save souls." Can you imagine what the disciples must have thought? I'm asking you today: what are you thinking about when you hear that claim?

Remember what I have said many times now: Jesus' mission, as described for us in John's gospel, is to reveal who God is; I've referred to Jesus as the "God-Revealer."

Throughout his gospel, John uses metaphors in the form of I AM statements: I AM the good shepherd, I AM the light of the world, I AM the true vine—seven of them in all. This is the first I AM metaphor in his gospel. I AM the bread of life. I want to look with you into the significance of our "manna-from-heaven Lord."

I want to say the following concerning manna:

- 1] manna comes down from heaven
- 2] manna is nourishment for body & soul
- 3] manna is given daily
- 4] manna symbolizes a relationship between the

the gift-receiver

gift-giver and

- 5] manna is holy food for holy people

Think of these five statements in the light of what Jesus is saying to you and to me today:

I AM your manna! I AM your holy food come down from heaven as a gift daily as nourishment, inviting us into a relationship with God.

We are going to sing one of our favorite hymns as we close our service today, "I am the bread of life."

We will sing:

- "eat this bread
- "never be hungry "
- "believe in me"
- "live forever"

- “we will be raised up on the last day!”

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The Message translation helps me to understand what this look like; “to be raised up”, writes Peterson, means “to be put together, to be set on my feet, to be prepared to live with God for ever.”

I see this as an echo of God’s word to the Israelites through the words spoken by Jeremiah: “I have loved you with an everlasting love. Therefore I have drawn you with loving kindness. Again, I will build you up, and you shall be re-built” (Jeremiah 31:3-4)

Let me go back to my statements about manna to highlight again three words used then:
GIFT — not something earned, but something offered to all who will receive it, without conditions

DAILY — not once and for all, not occasionally, but each day of our life ... We say in praying the Lord’s Prayer: “give us this day our daily bread”—we might say give us today this manna from heaven.

RELATIONSHIP — I understand relationship with God to be a vertical relationship, not a horizontal one. I think we do an injustice to think of our relationship with God—eternal life with God—to lie ahead of us some day, if we make it there. You have heard me say this before: eternal life is a vertical relationship with God that can be a reality in our lives NOW!

When we sing our closing hymn this morning, remember this: “I will raise them up on the last day” can be a reality NOW! Eternal life is one end of a vertical RELATIONSHIP, offered DAILY, as God’s GIFT for you ...NOW!

Pray with me ...

Lord, help me to open my arms and my heart to accept this MANNA now.

AMEN