

09.07.25 ~ Pentecost 13
“Jesus: The Eternal Bread of Life”
The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Exodus 16:1-4, 31-35 ^{NIV}

¹ The whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt. ² In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. ³ The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the Lord’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.”

⁴ Then the Lord said to Moses, “I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions.

³¹ The people of Israel called the bread manna. It was white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey. ³² Moses said, “This is what the Lord has commanded: ‘Take an omer of manna and keep it for the generations to come, so they can see the bread I gave you to eat in the wilderness when I brought you out of Egypt.’”

³³ So Moses said to Aaron, “Take a jar and put an omer of manna in it. Then place it before the Lord to be kept for the generations to come.”

³⁴ As the Lord commanded Moses, Aaron put the manna with the tablets of the covenant law, so that it might be preserved. ³⁵ The Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a land that was settled; they ate manna until they reached the border of Canaan.

Leader: These Are the Words of God through Moses.

People: Thanks be to God!

John 6:43-51 ^{GNT}

⁴³ Jesus answered, “Stop grumbling among yourselves. ⁴⁴ People cannot come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them to me; and I will raise them to life on the last day. ⁴⁵ The prophets wrote, ‘Everyone will be taught by God.’ Anyone who hears the Father and learns from him comes to me. ⁴⁶ This does not mean that anyone has seen the Father; he who is from God is the only one who has seen the Father. ⁴⁷ I am telling you the truth: he who believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your ancestors ate manna in the desert, but they died. ⁵⁰ But the bread that comes down from heaven is of such a kind that whoever eats it will not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If you eat this bread, you will live forever. The bread that I will give you is my flesh, which I give so that the world may live.”

Leader: These Are Jesus’ Words of Eternal Truth.

All: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Holy Lord, we thank you for this fall-like day to remind us that although the seasons and weather change, you are steady and true. We hear your words of Scripture and prepare to remember your sacrifice, hoping to feel your presence among us. We know you are here; we also know that you direct our lives if we surrender to your will. Help us to hear a new message within these familiar words of Moses and Jesus. Help us to draw closer to you in hearts, minds, and souls as we continue our worship. Lord, we ask you to illuminate this concept of eternal bread so that we can share Jesus with others. Speak through the words and this messenger to each one of us. Thank you for your love and steadfast presence every day. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

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For the last three weeks, we studied the challenging apocalyptic four beasts in Chapter 7 of the book, Daniel. We learned new interpretations of these images, both past empires and future conflicts. I do hope you will find or found the time to read the whole book of Daniel, but especially that chapter. This lesson today is not quite as intense, but also involves symbol, metaphor, and analogy about God's kingdom and his intense love for us through Jesus. During our sermons, we have so little time to build context, so this week, please re-read Chapter 16 of Exodus, and all of Chapter 6 from John, in any translation. You are already familiar with both, but in my humble opinion, it will enhance your communion experiences in the future.

Today's Scripture reminds us the people of Israel are in the desert wilderness, having escaped the slavery of Pharaoh in Egypt. They are starving, fearful, and hungry. In Chapter 15, however, their thirst was satisfied when God provided water from the rock at Marah, despite their cynicism and critical spirits. Like so many Bible stories we have read and much like our own skeptical personalities, the people of Israel quickly forgot God's generosity and began murmuring against Moses because of their hunger and lack of food. God took pity on them and provided quail

meat and manna, bread from heaven to support their physical needs. The word manna comes from the Hebrew, “What is it?” As they saw the white sweet, flaky substance on the ground, the Jews asked that question. As per Moses’ instructions from God, they gathered just enough to eat for each day. Anything they hoarded spoiled, except what they were to gather for the Sabbath. The sixth day’s gathering was for two days, and it lasted until the seventh day of rest. Now, as in all societies, there are greedy people who think they are being smart and competitive; they went out on the Sabbath thinking they would gather more manna than those who were resting but found none.

God did tell Moses to keep an *omer* of manna (about two quarts) as a memorial reminder for future generations. It was to be placed in front of the two tablets of Law (which held the Ten Commandments) called the “Testimony.” It was carried later in the Ark of the Covenant when they moved on. This manna memorial was to help future generations of Jews remember their covenants with God and his generosity for their obedience. It was also a reminder of their hunger due to disobedience. The Lord continued to supply their needs with manna and quail for forty years until Gilgal, the first camp after crossing the Jordan River into the Promised Land, where they would eat the delicious produce from the land of Canaan (Joshua 5:12). Before they found the Promised Land of milk and honey, that bread and meat sustained the physical lives of God’s people, Israel, and for those who really trusted him, their spiritual lives as well. That is, until Jesus.

Grumbling or murmuring must be a human condition! It comes back to us again in John 6 as the people complain first about food and then

about who he really is. Early in John 6, Jesus performs the miracle of feeding the five thousand with five barley loaves of bread and only two fishes. The second miracle was him walking on the water to the boat on the Sea of Galilee. Those miracles opened the door for questioning his power and purpose. When the crowd found him again in Capernaum, they were still full of the bread he had provided yet questioned him anyway. Jesus told the people not to work for bread that makes you hungry again, but to fill themselves with and believe in the Son of Man God sent from heaven. They were confused, so he explained that God sent Moses bread (manna) from heaven to sustain their bodies, but God also sent him, the Christ, from heaven to sustain and save their lives for all eternity. They were in disbelief because they knew this man from Nazareth, Joseph's son, and could not believe that he was the Messiah for whom they had been waiting. They did not yet know what **we** know that Jesus' incarnation was from a virgin birth as prophesied.

Despite their murmuring, Jesus continued to explain that God, not Moses, had provided the manna in the wilderness, and even though their ancestors had benefitted, they still had died. Jesus then declares the revolutionary thought that if they believe in him, they will live forever! That **he** is the bread of life; through his teachings and his love, they will come to know God more deeply and personally. In the paragraph before our Scripture for today, Jesus invites them to believe: “³⁵ . . . I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. ³⁶ But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe (John 6:35-36).”

Our message reminder today is that through Christ, we know God better, and through our faith in God, we know Christ. Yet we must pursue them both, even as they pursue and transform our hearts; we must go willingly to the feet of Jesus. We must humbly surrender to Christ's grace and salvation in order to receive it. Each month, as we observe communion, we have another chance to renew our commitment to Jesus, get to know him through his word and the symbolic eating of the bread and drinking of the juice. We remember his body broken for our sin and his blood poured out on the cross to save our souls.

Jesus, who died for us on the cross and rose again on that third day, is the sacrificial bread and wine of the new covenant and is the gift of eternal life, sent by God the Father himself to live among us and free us of our sin and poor choices. Eating and drinking the symbolic living bread and juice in this cup remind us of the sacrifice. "Eating" in this case means believing, not consuming, as a figure of speech. My concern as a pastor is that our routines of eucharist or communion can become so liturgical, expected, and mundane that we forget the dramatic sacrifice of our Lord and Savior. By Christ's death, eternal life is available to us, our loved ones, and to the world. To claim this eternal life of Jesus as demonstrated in our two ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, we **must have a strong and intimate faith in Jesus**. Coming to church on Sundays is not enough. As we go to the table today, ponder these words and the implications on your life. This gift of eternal life has both freedom and responsibility, but the mysteries we will not understand until we meet God face to face. Are you ready to stop grumbling about the world and our lives today? Are you ready to recommit your lives to the

service of our Lord? Are you willing to surrender egos, wealth, and will to Jesus' guidance in your lives? It is never too late for that first time belief or renewal, that personal and intimate connection. Jesus IS the Eternal Bread of Life. Do you accept him, love him with all of your heart and soul? If you have any faith questions, let's have a deeper conversation; eternal lives are at stake. Jesus is the answer. Amen. ||

Let us pray. Dear Lord, we come to you on our knees anxious about our world today, and we need your intervention. Forgive us. Thank you for symbolic language that wakes us up from complacency. Help us to remember your sacrifice on the cross and the glory of your resurrection. Let us reflect on our faith and relationship with you; help us to feed our spiritual hunger and thirst with your Word in Scripture and through consistent prayer for others and ourselves, listening as well as speaking. Help us to move beyond routine rituals into deeper, more meaningful worship and praise. For it is in your name, we pray, Amen.