

11th Sunday after Pentecost – Year B
Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY
Exodus 16:2-31
Pastor Paul Horn

August 16, 2009

Look for the glory of the LORD...

And he will send true manna from heaven

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. 5 On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days.”

6 So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “In the evening you will know that it was the LORD who brought you out of Egypt, 7 and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?” 8 Moses also said, “You will know that it was the LORD when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the LORD.”

9 Then Moses told Aaron, “Say to the entire Israelite community, ‘Come before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling.’”

10 While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the LORD appearing in the cloud.

11 The LORD said to Moses, 12 “I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, ‘At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.’”

13 That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. 14 When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. 15 When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was.

Moses said to them, “It is the bread the LORD has given you to eat. 16 This is what the LORD has commanded: ‘Each one is to gather as much as he needs. Take an omer (2 liters) for each person you have in your tent.’”

17 The Israelites did as they were told; some gathered much, some little. 18 And when they measured it by the omer, he who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little. Each one gathered as much as he needed.

19 Then Moses said to them, “No one is to keep any of it until morning.”

20 However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell. So Moses was angry with them.

21 Each morning everyone gathered as much as he needed, and when the sun grew hot, it melted away. 22 On the sixth day, they gathered twice as much—two omers for each person—and the leaders of the community came and reported this to Moses. 23 He said to them, “This is what the LORD commanded: ‘Tomorrow is to be a day of rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD. So bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning.’”

24 So they saved it until morning, as Moses commanded, and it did not stink or get maggots in it. 25 “Eat it today,” Moses said, “because today is a Sabbath to the LORD. You will not find any of it on the ground today. 26 Six days you are to gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will not be any.”

27 Nevertheless, some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather it, but they found none. 28 Then the LORD said to Moses, “How long will you (plural in the Hebrew) refuse to keep my commands and my instructions? 29 Bear in mind that the LORD has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where he is on the seventh day; no one is to go out.” 30 So the people rested on the seventh day. 31 The people of Israel called the bread manna. It was white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey.

When you see the skies like this picture here, what do you think of? [picture of sun’s rays peeking through dark clouds] The announcement of Christ’s birth by the angels to the shepherds? Christ’s baptism? His transfiguration? Christ’s return on the Last Day? Or perhaps God smiling down on us? Or maybe even today’s story from Exodus 16?

One month after the exodus from Egypt, the people of the nation of Israel were probably running out of the supplies they brought from Egypt. It never fails on a family trip... an hour from your destination the tummies start rumbling, you’ve run out of snacks, and the kids start complaining, “I’m hungreeeeeeee!” The children of Israel complained and grumbled in the wilderness of the Sinai Peninsula. Listen to their voice of desperation, “If only we had died by LORD’s hand in Egypt!” What they were really saying was, “If only we had perished in the final plague. Then we wouldn’t have to march through this wasteland with no food. In Egypt we had more than enough to eat. We’d rather be back in slavery than be out here in the wilderness.” The Israelites were fickle people, weren’t they? And how thankless and disrespectful!

But notice the LORD's patience and mercy. He listened... and he responded. He promised he would provide meat in the evening and cause bread to rain down from heaven in the morning. But the LORD gives specific instructions about gathering the heavenly bread, "In order to test them to see if they will trust my promises." (vs4) It would take trust on the part of the people to gather only as much as they needed, and rely on God's promise that there would be more the next day. It would take trust to gather twice as much on Friday and know that God would not cause it to spoil on Saturday. That's what the LORD was looking for; for the people to listen to his instructions and to trust him and act accordingly.

And as if his word of promise wasn't enough, he provides a demonstration of his power so that they might believe. "Here's how you will know that it is the LORD who brought you out of Egypt; here's how you will know that it is the LORD who will provide for you: in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD." (vs6,7)

Throughout the Old Testament the glory of the LORD was a special manifestation of the LORD. He made his presence known in a visible demonstration of power as a sign of his determination to keep his Gospel promise to send a Savior who would be born from a family within this Jewish nation.

The next morning, while Moses' brother Aaron addressed the people, a supernatural radiant light shone from a cloud in the desert. In the Hebrew language it reads, "And behold! There was the glory of the LORD!" And then the LORD spoke. "I have heard your complaint. I will provide for your physical needs. You will have meat and bread and you will be filled." I don't know about you, but if I were one of the ones complaining in the camp, and saw the glory of the LORD, I would have been shaking in my sandals. You see, through this display of power, not only did the LORD supply the earthly needs of his people, but also provided for their spiritual needs. The significance of this supernatural appearance was to say to their hearts, "I have the power to destroy you, and I ought to because of your complaining and failure to trust me. But I am still your God. I am the LORD, the God of promise, and I have the desire to keep my promise to the world to send a Savior to rescue them from their many sins. So listen to me." That's what God wants. He wishes sinners to be aware of their sin and to shake in terror in the presence of God Almighty and fall down on their knees in repentance. The LORD also wants to lift up the penitent and forgive them and reassure them that he does forgive them. That was the purpose of the glory of the LORD; to demonstrate that God was with his people, that he loved them, and therefore, they ought to listen to him.

Have you ever worked on a construction site? Typically at the beginning of the day the foreman gives a brief reminder on safety to the workers and instructions for the plans of the day and sends them off to do their work. If a worker fails to listen and doesn't follow instructions, there could be big problems. Let's say one of the workers goes to the work site that day and installs the dry wall, begins tapping and mudding, but he didn't listen to his foreman who said that the electrician and plumber hadn't done their work yet. Big problems...

How often do we fail to listen to the instructions our God gives us? Are there some times in our lives when we are like the folks who gathered too much manna and the bread became rotten and smelly? We don't listen to our God's commands and our life becomes smelly and rotten. Or we find ourselves empty handed, like the guys who went out on the Sabbath day to find bread, only to come back to the tent empty handed. We go spiritually hungry when we don't listen to God's Word. We go empty handed when we do not allow God to feed us with heavenly manna, that is, by being absent from worship where his Word is proclaimed and his Sacraments administered.

That's not to say if we faithfully listen to and carry out God's Word that our life will be sweet smelling, sitting on the beach, singing with Kenny Chesney, "No shoes, no shirt, no problems." Sometimes we are like the folks who gathered just enough each day, and who gathered twice as much on Friday, and had enough to eat. We act on what we've heard our God tell us in his Word. We're faithful with worship and receiving the Lord's Supper and still, we find that life smells. "Why won't the Lord remove this "thorn in my side," this illness that won't go away? Why do I continue to have problems in my relationships with my friends, spouse, children or neighbors? Why is it that I'm struggling while I care for my ailing loved one?"

The same could apply for our church. Over the past 15 years we've listened to God's commands. We've carried out his work in our congregation. We teach God's people about Scriptural stewardship, but financially, we're just not making it. We share the good news of Jesus with unchurched people, but they still do not come. We lovingly rebuke inactive members with God's Word and they still don't return. We've been praying for your Word to work, Lord! Sometimes we wonder, "Where's our sign? Where's our "glory of the LORD"? And we begin to doubt God's promises and wonder, "When is he going to act as he promised?"

When we wonder when he's going to act, when we doubt if he hears us, all we need to do is look to our Savior, Jesus Christ – there we see glory. But what he did isn't very glorious, is it? There is no glory fasting for 40 days in the wilderness, tempted by Satan. There is no glory being tied to a post and whipped over and over again. There is no glory trudging through the streets of Jerusalem, dragging a tree on your back. There is no glory being pinned to that tree on a hill. Through human eyes, there is no glory in what he did. Just as there is no glory for being a soldier of the United States of America, because no one sees what you do. Whether you're shuffling papers, sitting at a computer, out in the field, patrolling the streets of Baghdad, or roaming the hills of Afghanistan, no one sees that. But what you accomplish through your work is glorious. The fact that we can gather here this morning and worship without threat of punishment or imprisonment is glorious.

What Jesus did is not glorious in human eyes, but what he accomplished certainly is. He was tempted by Satan, but stands up to each enticement and does not fall. He does this on our behalf – because it is obvious we have not been able to resist Satan through our

lack of trust. There's Jesus' glory. There is no glory in being flogged and beaten, but the anger of God was beating against him. His Father was punishing him for our many sins. There's his glory. There is no glory trudging through the streets of Jerusalem, barely able to walk under the burden of that tree on his shoulders. But he carries the burden of our sins. There he is hanging on a cross. Definitely not glory in human eyes, but he cries out, "It is finished!" That is Christ's glory, for with that cry he declared victory has been won. He wins the victory over your sins and mine, over Satan and hell itself. Even in his resurrection, there really was no glory. No one was there to witness it except some frightened Roman soldiers. But it is his glory. For his bodily resurrection from the grave means that he has destroyed the power of death. It could not hold him. It will not hold us. On the Last Day the angels will summon us from our graves when he comes to judge and take us to Promised Land where we will never be hungry or thirsty again.

There is no glory in the means Jesus uses to give us these accomplishments. Baptism is simple water and a simple command of Christ. But it washes away our sins forever and clothes us with Christ's glory. It creates true faith. The Lord's Supper is simple bread and simple wine, but Christ's glory is here, for he promises his body and blood are also present, for the forgiveness of your sins. This book is very simple, but it is God's Word and it creates and sustains saving faith. This is the true manna that comes from heaven. This is the bread of life: Christ himself. He is the bread which gives us life eternal. And this heavenly bread comes to us through his Word, Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. This bread comforts us, reassures us and strengthens us.

In our gospel this morning Jesus said to crowd of people whom he had fed with bread and fish, "I have heavenly manna that gives life to the world." The people said, "Give us this bread!" We too, when we have opted not to listen to God's Word, when we find life to be smelly and stinky and unfulfilled, when we find ourselves spiritually hungry and empty, we will turn to Christ and say, "Give us this bread!" And he will feed us. When we are frustrated, when we don't see God's word working as quickly as we'd like it to, when all we can see is the impossible, we will look to the Almighty God and seek his glory. We will find his glory in his Word and Sacraments. His glory is in his promises to you, "Eat this bread of life, my Word and Sacraments, for I have promised that through it your sins are washed away and I will empower you to live life. I will provide for you. I will work everything out for your good. I will act in my time and in my way. All I ask of you is to be faithful, listen to my instructions and carry them out."

It would be nice to see a magnification of this [a picture of sun's rays peeking through clouds] every now and then, wouldn't it? An awesome display of God's glory... to remind us that he's with us, to see Him, to hear his voice so that we might push our faithlessness aside and believe. But we do see him and hear him, everyday, in his Word and Sacraments. There he is with us. His presence is even with us now. He has promised it. May we always look for the glory of the Lord, so that he may provide the true manna from heaven, the bread of life, Christ Jesus himself. To God alone be the glory! Amen!