

Sunday 4th July 2021 Ex 16:1-8 Manna from heaven John 6:43-51 Leader Caro Staton; Preacher Bill Craft

You can imagine the euphoria of the Israelites as they crossed the Red Sea. Wow! What an experience. Isn't God great? Did you see the way the Egyptians got caught in the mud, those chariots! And we just walk over. Not a speck of mud. Alleluia, our God is great!!

But the euphoria did not last. Within 3 days they were grumbling. We are thirsty and there is no water. Then God gave them sweet water and led them to Elim a place of plenty with 12 springs and 70 palm trees. (Presumably date palms). God was providing for his people - generously. Sometime later the whole tribe set out into the desert again, the desert of Sin. Soon the grumbling starts again, so much so, that many wanted to be back in Egypt, living under slavery. There they had food enough. Talk about being ruled by your stomach.

Moses takes the complaints to God and the Lord in his mercy reaches out to his people. God gave them manna! I'm sure you know the story of God providing the manna day by day. The bible tells us that each morning "a layer of dew surrounded the camp when the dew evaporated in the sun, thin flakes like frost appeared on the desert floor.... it was white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made of honey." Every morning. To be collected each day; just enough for each person; double portion for the Sabbath; never too much, never too little, for 40 years!

I want to focus first on what the manna tells us about God, about his incredible grace and love towards his people. Secondly we need to think about what God wanted to teach the Israelites through the giving of the manna. It was visual aid that the nation never forgot over the centuries. Finally we want to reflect on what all that might mean for us today.

The provision of manna for the Israelites above all else demonstrates God's total love and care for his people. Even though they were ungrateful for what he has already done for them, even though they resented his interference in their lives, even though they constantly moaned about the difficulties they faced in the desert, even though they didn't trust God enough to see them through. God took great pains to respond to their complaints and to provide for them. His provision was enough and it was good.

God had already demonstrated his majesty in bringing nation out of Egypt and across the Red sea, and now he demonstrated his glory to them as for the first time they went out to find the manna. (Ex 16:10) Now this awesome, majestic God was about to show them his personal care, his generosity, his faithfulness, and his wisdom.

God took great care over his people. Think of the care that God had over them, over each one of them, for each man had his own "omer" or supply, of manna. No woman, no child, was forgotten. Every morning, there was the sufficient quantity for every person, according to his hunger for that day. There was no more than was needed; and there was never any less; so carefully did God watch over each individual. It reminds us of how God knows us as individuals. In God's eyes we are not a crowd, but each one of us a beloved child.

Manna shows the generosity of God. It was a free gift from God, and provision for each day was sufficient. In his wisdom God provided something absolutely right for the circumstances. The manna tasted good; like wafers made with honey. I love the comment in the Apocrypha that the manna tasted differently to each person. Each person received something to eat that they liked! Amazing, but a better solution than 40 years of the same taste day after day. Each person found enough to fill the stomach each day; the flavour to his liking, and it remained enjoyable for the whole journey.

Manna shows the faithfulness of God. He faithfully provided enough manna for each day. When the nation moved on the manna was always there for them. When they camped for long periods in the same place the manna was there for them. Note in passing during the 40 years their clothes did not wear out, they did not suffer from blistered feet. God thought of everything!

The manna shows us something of God's wisdom. He did not provide enough manna in one day to last the forty years! Just think of trying to carry 40 years' worth of food! Enough for each day, a blessing to eat, no labour in carrying or preparing it.

So the manna shows us that God is utterly caring for his people, but we also need to recognise that God was testing his people through this. They were given clear instructions about gathering the manna, but some didn't believe God, so they took matters into their own hands. The manna appeared in the morning, but melted away as the sun rose. It appeared as small loaves of bread, doesn't look much! So some went out to gather as much as they could to keep some for the future. Prudent? No ...disobedient! They soon found that trying to be selfish results in smelly, maggot filled food. The Israelites had to go out to gather manna every day. God was teaching obedience. He had the details worked out. Obey God's instructions and all will be well. God was teaching that they could trust him for that sufficient supply. No need to gather up more than a day's supply, no need to hoard for the future.

So God is teaching the Israelites that he is able to supply all they needed, that he can be trusted to maintain that supply as the needs change in life. Finally God was teaching the people to be content with what he supplies. It is enough, it is right for the job, and it will be provided for as long as it is needed.

So are there lessons in this for us today?

As parents we try to discipline our children that they might become responsible adults, we look past the groaning of our children as we seek to teach them how to live and behave. God was in the business of teaching his chosen people how to live as a community honouring their creator in all things; how to worship; how to care for one another; how to stand up against their enemies; how to behave as the chosen people and live as a light to the rest of the world.

I hope you can begin to see a pattern in all this. The manna was food provided from heaven, spiritual food. It was God's free gift to his people, all they had to do was obediently gather it up. In the eating of it they would show their obedience and faith and trust in him.

Our second reading from John's gospel throws an additional light on this. John 6 31 reads: Jesus said "Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert.... I tell you it is not Moses who has given you bread, it is my Father..... I am the living bread. If anyone eats of this bread he will live for ever. This bread is my flesh which I will give for the life of the world"

The manna was God's gift to the Israelites to sustain their lives and to remind them that they were God's special people. Jesus tells us that He now is that God given food, that bread of life, and we are to feed on him as the Israelites fed on the manna.

The manna was provided every day, enough for the day.... We need to turn to Jesus and his word day by day, and take in refreshment for the day. I find it amazing that in daily bible readings so often the words are so appropriate for my current situation. Even this week as I was preparing for a meeting I found that I was taken to a reading that was so helpful, so appropriate in the circumstances.

The great Christian writer and preacher Spurgeon says remember "*the manna was always encased in dew. The Israelites took care to gather this, for then it became sweet dew to them. May the Word of the Lord always have a dew upon it to you! The critic takes God's Word, and he treats it as the sun did the manna. He pours a dry heat upon it, and it evaporates, and it is gone. But the child of God takes care that he loses nothing of what God has revealed. Every word is precious to him; every jot and tittle; and under the bedewing influences of the Holy Spirit he gathers Christ fresh constantly!*" God's word to us is life giving and a joy to receive.

It seems to me that the daily giving of the manna reminds us that we need God for each day. Sometimes we get lazy and forget to spend time with God. But we need our spiritual food daily, we cannot live on last years

“manna”. We cannot live on the memories of long ago experiences of God in our lives. To be vibrant and relevant we need to experience God daily, we need our daily encounter with the Holy Spirit..

The exciting part is that at times, when it was needed, God provided the nation with a double supply. We too need to be on the lookout for a double supply. When the Holy Spirit engages with us for a particular reason, when God is preparing us for some act for him. For me those times are indeed special and memories sustain me through more barren times. I pray that you all might experience those days of double supply and rejoice in God’s generosity to you.

So there we have it. Manna from heaven. Proof of God’s enduring love for the nation of Israel as it journeyed across the desert to the Promised Land. And we have the words of Jesus, our manna from heaven, our proof of Gods’ enduring love for you and me. How will you respond to this? Will you go out each day to gather your omer of manna? We believe in a majestic God who longs to show us his personal care, his generosity, his faithfulness, and his wisdom. Will you take time to take on board God’s word? Will you allow the Holy Spirit to teach, instruct and guide you through each day? I pray you will.