

Manna Up!
Exodus 16:2-4, 9-15 / John 6:24-35
Colebrook Congregational Church
Ordinary 18 / August 2, 2015 / Communion Sunday

While I am not an avid gamer, a good number of games that both Theresa and I indulge in involves something like mana. Nearly all video games have health indicator, which is red, and you can increase how much health you have by looking for a container of health, which is also red. There is usually a second indicator, but that one is colored blue, and usually referred to as mana. Even if it isn't in that game, a gamer can refer to it as mana and their buddies know what is being referred to. Mana allows you to do magic or exercise certain skills that are helpful in the gameplay. This red and blue is so prevalent in games, that jokers label faucets and water coolers that have red and blue knobs as health & mana. I doubt that the creator of this iconography intended that the blue mana be associated with the manna from God in the Bible. However, they both represent something that was needed and allowed those who partake of it to continue on with their respective journey.

Over the last month or so, we have been following Jesus through a coherent timeline that three of the Gospels agree upon, at a basic level. But today is a bit divergent. Where last week I focused on a part from Matthew that wasn't in the others, today is a bit of John that is not in the others, but it still fits the timeline. So we are effectively hopping from Gospel to Gospel, but the story is still progressing in order.

So to recap, Jesus is rejected in Nazareth at the beginning of the chapter with Mark, then the Disciples are sent on a mission, then John the Baptist is executed, then the Feeding of the Five Thousand, then the incident in the boat, and Jesus walks on water, then they come ashore. Matthew diverges with Peter going to meet Jesus. Then Jesus goes ashore and things happen. Matthew & Mark have very general statements about what happened when Jesus went ashore, but John gives more details.

Starting in John, we have the crowd, which is the same one from the previous day where Jesus fed them all. This crowd is looking for Jesus, and is doing some detective work, finally finding Jesus. When they do, they ask him

when did he get there. And like many times in John, Jesus answers a different question than what was asked.

Jesus recognizes that these guys hunted Him down, not because of faith, but because of the food. In Jesus' presence, their bellies were filled, and they were looking for more. They engaged in a huge effort to find Him somewhere on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, and knowing this, Jesus tells them they should have sought out the spiritual bread, that is enduring and meaningful, not just the mundane bread that fills them for just a day. So, instead of trying to get handouts from Him, they should have been out doing God's work!

Now, in the Book of Deuteronomy, there is a passage that charges people to challenge anyone who claims to speak for God. Chapter 18 verse 19 tells people that signs will be performed and if they are successful, it proves that the speaker speaks the truth. Also, that the message is consistent with known truths. So, what the crowd does next is not only expected, but is their duty, to do. They challenge Jesus to produce a sign to prove what he says. They bring up the story we heard from the Book of Exodus, where the nomadic people of Israel were fed by collecting the crystallized honeydew of a scale insect, as directed by God. So the crowd is suddenly unimpressed with the sign of the full belly. Jesus brushes the skepticism aside, saying that the manna came from God, not Moses. And that what He is talking about is different, anyway. He is offering heavenly sustenance to those who choose to accept it.

I rather enjoy snickers bars, and I have found their current advertising campaign to be rather entertaining. The television ads that point out how someone, depicted by a famous stand-in, is cranky or restless or angry when they're hungry, so they are offered a snickers bar, it satisfies, and the person returns to normal and carries on.

There is a similar principle here. The snickers is like the manna from God, which makes things better for the believer, the hungry person.

Jesus tells us that we must make the choice of whether to follow Him and

partake of God's manna, and if we do, then we should do God's work, not worry so much about mundane things. Jesus did not like that the crowd had followed Him for more free meal instead of doing something more meaningful. For me, that reminds me of the old Puritan saying, "Idle hands are the Devil's workshop."

I like to keep myself busy. Whenever I've moved, I initially find myself with a lot of free time. Sometimes I played video games, or watched movies, or done other idle things. I would then feel like I was missing something, that I was being wasteful with my time. It was like I was suddenly anxious, that I needed to change what I was doing. So, I would then go out and try to find something more meaningful to do. One thing I did in college was draw simple little landscapes and then give them to friends who were having bad days to cheer them up. In seminary I organized events that offered stress relief to fellow students. Then in Worcester, I found a church that I could be useful at and helped out with and expanded their programming.

God's work, as Jesus tells us, is what we must do if we choose to eat the manna that God provides. And God's work is accomplished with things great and small. It could be something small, like seeing to the immediate need of a friend or neighbor, because when we do anything to benefit a person in any sort of need, we do so for Jesus as well. And it could be something very involved. It doesn't matter how big or small, as long as something is done, and that it helps someone.

Each one of us, has a choice to make. Jesus is the bread of life, and offers us the divine manna from God. We have to choose whether or not we will eat it. And once we do, we have to do God's work. And each of us needs to choose how to do God's work. It can be done individually on our owns. And it can be done collectively, together with others, here in this church for our community. Each of us needs to decide how they are going to manna up!

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

[PAUSE]

O God, you invite us to hold the needs of our sisters and brothers as dear to us as our own needs. Loving our neighbors as ourselves, we offer our thanksgivings and our petitions on behalf of the church and the world.

We thank you for Your blessings, and for the lessons You teach us. We thank You for those You have to help us in our daily lives. And we thank You for the opportunities to serve You through serving our neighbors.

We pray for the forgiveness of our transgressions. We pray for your guidance in living our lives in more loving ways.

We pray for those who are unwell of mind, body, or spirit. We pray for their recovery, we pray for their caregivers, and we pray that you move us to help them in anyway our gifts allow. We pray for those who are lost, that may find guidance. We pray for those who protect us, please keep them safe as they keep us safe. And we pray that you help us be instruments of your divine love.

We especially pray for:

Hear our prayers, O God, and through the ministry of your Son, free us from the grip of the distractions, that we may be of service to others in your name in our lives and proclaiming your saving deeds to all the world. Amen.

Exodus 16:2-4, 9-15

16:2 The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.

16:3 The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

16:4 Then the LORD said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not.

16:9 Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, 'Draw near to the LORD, for he has heard your complaining.'"

16:10 And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud.

16:11 The LORD spoke to Moses and said,

16:12 "I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.'"

16:13 In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp.

16:14 When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground.

16:15 When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat.

John 6:24-35

6:24 So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus.

6:25 When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?"

6:26 Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.

6:27 Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal."

6:28 Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?"

6:29 Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."

6:30 So they said to him, "What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing?"

6:31 Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

6:32 Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven.

6:33 For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

6:34 They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."

6:35 Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.