

Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
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John Crosby
Manna/Bread of Life | Exodus 16-17; John 6:35

Been thinking yet about what you're going to have for lunch? I of course haven't, but I'm much more spiritual, and besides, I had a meal on Friday...I can't tell you how great this meal was . . . unbelievably good! Three courses, so we're going to talk about three courses of meals today. We had the rabbit food, that was okay, then we had Beef Wellington, which was unbelievably good, and we polished it off with a dessert that had the word "sin" in it. How can you lose? It was great. There's not a ton of memorable meals. Mostly we just eat because we get hungry and then we go back to life and then we have to eat again. What are you hungry for today?

We talked last week . . . the kid's musical was all about a special meal that anybody who was there would never forget. People weren't going to die, but they were hungry and Jesus took two pieces of bread and five tiny little fish and fed 5,000 families. They'll never forget it. And today we're going to talk about another one of the meals of the Bible and I want to ask you again, what are you hungry for? Who do you identify with?

This comes from the—the first course comes from a different part of the story—it's what little miss Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs was talking about (referring to the Children's Sermon from earlier). It's a story of Exodus. The Israelites have been trapped as slaves in Egypt for a couple of hundred years. They were rescued, not because Moses was so smart, but because God split the Red Sea and let them go. So, they got through the Red Sea and they're on their way to the Promised Land. Now, the Promised Land—where they end up in Palestine—is only about a three-week walk, they could make it in a month easily, and somehow it takes them 40 years! But they're on their way and this is what happens next.

¹ All the Israelites set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, on the way to Sinai (Sinai Desert), on the fifteenth day of the second month out of Egypt. ² In the desert they all grumbled against Moses and Aaron. [Exodus 16:1-2]

Remember that phrase: they all grumbled against Moses and Aaron. Last night in the kid's sermon, Jordyn said to the kids, "Have any of you ever complained or whined? Have any of you ever grumbled?" All the kids' hands were up. She forgot to do that today, so let's just do a little reality check. This week, have any of you complained? Have any of you whined? Have any of you grumbled? Is anybody sitting next to you lying? It says all the Israelites 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 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.” [Exodus 16:3-5]

This is how He created the Sabbath. You don’t work on the seventh day; you just eat and relax. And so for 40 years, God supplied them with manna every morning and quail filled the skies and filled the ground so they had birds to eat every night. The problem was they kept whining—they were out of Egypt, but Egypt was not out of them. After all those years, they had the DNA of slavery inside of them and they didn’t act free, yet. They had the taste buds of Egypt, but were headed to the Promised Land, so they whined to Moses. They were in the land in-between and by a thousand years later, in Jesus’ time, they had perfected the art of whining—not much had changed. This is the third course. The second course is last week. It says: After Jesus fed the 5,000 people the crowd wanted to make Him the king, so Jesus left them. It says in John 6:

²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, “Rabbi, when did you get here?” ²⁶ Jesus answered, “You are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. ²⁷ Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that leads to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you (That was Jesus’ name for Himself—Son of Man). For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.” [John 6:25-27]

Then we get a little Jewish teaching. This is how the Jews learned. They would say, “And then what happened? And then what happened?” So look at what happens next:

Jesus says, “Work for eternal life bread.” ²⁸ Then the crowd asked Him, “Well, what work does God require?” ²⁹ Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.” Okay, but . . . ³⁰ So they asked him, “What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?” [John 6:28-30]

Now that sounds pretty wimpy to us, doesn’t it? But if somebody has just said to you, *Look, God sent me here. If you just trust me with your life all will be well* I don’t think it’s unreasonable to ask for some sign before you either follow them over the cliff or you put them in the loony bin. They asked for a sign.

The Jews said, “³¹ Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written in the Torah: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” ³² Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” [But then they said . . .] ³⁴ “Sir,” they said, “always give us this bread.” ³⁵ Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to Me will never go hungry, and

whoever believes in Me will never thirst. ³⁶ But as I told you, you have seen Me and still you do not believe. [A little later he says] ⁴⁰ For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day." ⁴¹ At this the Jews all began to grumble.
[John 6:31-36, 41]

It's a full circle. They grumble with Moses and Aaron and now they're grumbling with Jesus because they don't like what they're hearing. They whined because Jesus had said, "I'm the bread that came down from heaven." But the Jews said, "Wait a minute. Isn't this Yeshua? Little Jesus? Isn't this Joseph's son? Don't we know his mom and dad? How can he say now, "I came down from heaven"?" And this part of the story—this meal—does not end well. Which meal do you want? Which of the three course meals are you hungry for today?

Let me ask you this with your nonreligious hat on. Are you happy with the spiritual diet that fills your head, your heart, your mind? These days when you wake up does your soul sing or are you grumbling? Does your spiritual diet these days—however you describe that—does your spiritual diet fill you with joy or are you more and more fearful or are you angry? It comes from what you're feeding your soul. Do you have a sense that you are an eternal being, a beloved child of God? Or do you wake up and go, *geez, it's Tuesday already?* What is your diet talking to you about?

Let's talk about the three course meal. Let's talk about manna and let's start where the Jews started. It says:

² All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, "If only we had died in Egypt! ³ There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted."
[Exodus 16:2-3]

Here is the first example in history of fake news. Really, I'm not being political, but when they're telling the story they're forgetting about the whips. They're not remembering the beatings. They skip over the part where they cry out to God, "Save us! They're killing us here!" They remember the smells of the feasts of Egypt. Remember those huge pots of meat? I love that smell, but what they forget is they didn't get to eat that, that's what they served to their masters. They got the scraps that were left in the kitchen. I think the challenge is they preferred what was familiar and they were afraid to go out and get something new. I think it's still true. I think many of us still prefer the food of Egypt—the meat pots of Egypt—to going out and trying something new. It's hard. We live in a culture that says if you look like this like this impossibly beautiful woman or man, if you own this shiny toy, if you have this political position, then you're going to make it. Fill your soul with this food, that's Egyptian food. It's hard to avoid, very hard to avoid, and it's hard to learn to like the new food. I told you about this great meal. It is harder to learn to love rabbit food than Beef Wellington. My wife loves both. She is eating healthily. We need to start with a check on how you fill your mind. What are you filling

your soul with? How does the bread of God get into your heart? What would your life look like if you were eating this diet instead of that? Remember, they were out of Egypt, but Egypt was not out of them.

What are the signs in your life that your spiritual diet is God-deficient or Egypt-heavy? It's easy when we're talking about physical diets, right? You can tell right away. I'm eating too much; I had to buy the doublewide robe this last time. You're afraid to get on the scale. Your clothes don't fit well. You huff and puff when you run up the stairs. You can tell what's happening with your physical diet by the way that your physical body is responding, but what about your inside person? Could I tell something about your spiritual diet by the way that you're living? Are you eating your fruits?

Let's talk about the fruits for a second. God says if you start to eat the bread of life over and over, you're going to have fruits that come out of that. Here are the fruits of God's diet: It's love, and joy, and peace. Increasingly it's patience, and kindness, and goodness, and faithfulness, and gentleness, and self-control. And the idea is this: if you want to know how your diet is doing, ask yourself *am I more joyful than I was two years ago?* And if you're ready for the advanced class, ask yourself, *am I more patient than I was three year ago?* And if you want the truth, don't ask yourself; don't look in the mirror because the mirror was made in Egypt. Don't look in the mirror. If you really want to know how you're doing, ask someone that you know. Maybe they're sitting in the pew right next to you. *Friend, am I kinder than I used to be? Am I grumpier than I use to be?* Do you have the guts to ask somebody else how your soul looks? Or do you want to just say *I'm fine*. So, the Israelites complained because they liked the food of Egypt. The Jewish crowd does the same thing with Jesus and I think you and I do the same thing with Jesus. We complain because God wants to change our diet. We're like kids at the table who whine, "I hate peas!" Heather Hood gave me this cartoon the other day. It's a picture of Jesus feeding the 5,000 and the crowd is there and they're saying, "I can't eat that, I'm a vegan." "Has that fish been tested for mercury?" "Is that bread gluten-free?" "Can we go back to Chick-Fil-A?" Every day we pray—every day we're in church at least—we pray, "Give us this day our daily bread", but what kind of bread do we want? Are we really wanting the bread of life, which we know is good for us, or do we want Egyptian wonder bread? Give us this day our daily bread. That leads us to the daily checkup of what's your diet really like?

The second checkup is what's your schedule like? I told you that when we pray we are saying "Give us this day our daily bread." Not give us this month, give us this year, but give us this **day** our daily bread. How often are you eating the bread of heaven? In the story of the Israelites God says:

⁴ I will rain down bread from heaven for you. Each day the people should go out and pick up as much food as they need for that day. I will test them in this to see whether or not they will follow my instructions. [Exodus 16:4]

The problem is that manna is only good for one day. You have to eat new stuff every day because manna does not get stale, manna rots. And when manna rots, little worms get into it. You either have to eat it or throw it away. You eat it every day. You cannot eat it whenever you want. It doesn't work that way. God says *let's see if they trust Me enough to follow My instructions. Or will they start to hoard that spiritual experience? Or will they overeat enough to last them a whole morning or a whole week? Or will they over work?* You can't gorge on God's food one meal a week and live differently than the Egyptians. Why isn't your life changing the way the pastor says it can change? Well part of it is, how often are you eating the bread of heaven instead of the Egyptian wonder bread that you see on TV or at work? What's your diet frequency?

I need to stop here for just a second. I'm not trying to beat anybody up. I'm not trying to make you feel bad. I'm just trying to help you self-diagnose. Is there a positive God-oriented change happening in your life or are you just getting religious? You know, religious people are a lot like manna, they stink! They can tell you how bad they're doing, but they can't show you how God is blessing them. Are you gathering manna every day or are you going from feast to feast? We laugh at those people; we say, *they're the Christmas and Easter crowd, how can God change them?* Well, how well would you do if you ate a big meal Sunday at 11:00AM and didn't eat for the rest of the week? How is your spiritual menu going?

That leads to the third meal check. You check your diet, you check your schedule, then you check your work. At the core of this idea is how do you get eternal life? What do I have to work for to get to eternal life? That's what the crowd asked Jesus. It says, "Then the crowd asked Jesus, 'What work does God require?'" What do I have to do to have eternal life? Now, I've been thinking about this for several days now. I had hoped that a friend of mine would come here. We've talked every time he is around. We have a good time and he's not a religious guy really. He grew up Catholic and it singed him, it burned him. He's a great guy. He's a lot of fun. He's a very accomplished person. He's good to have around, he's good to be around, he's life-filled, and he's happier than a lot of the religious people I know. But anyway, all that to get to this: He asked, "Hey, are you talking? (Not are you preaching) Are you talking?" "Yeah" "Well then I'll probably come by." And I've thought about this guy a lot because I really like him and I can see him asking this question: *what do I have to do? All of my life I've worked hard and I've done whatever is required and I've done more.* He would say, "I'm not religious, but I live by the idea that my good deeds should speak for themselves. I screwed up the first marriage; I'll admit it, that was my fault, but look how hard I've worked to love and be loved the second time." He says *I'm trying to let my good deeds speak for themselves because good people will do all right if God is fair* and my friend wants to see what I think of that. He's a "hell of a pastor" friend. Every guy needs a "you're a hell of a pastor." How do you take that? But I think what he means is, *I don't want just more of the religious stuff. How do I get there from here?* And what I want to say to my friend is

that's exactly what the crowd is asking. What do I have to do, what works does God require of me to have eternal life? This is Jesus's answer.

Jesus says, "It's not about what you do. This is the work of God: to believe in the one he has sent." [John 6:29]

When He says to believe in the one that He has sent; that means to believe in Me. And when He says to believe in Me, what Jesus is really saying is, this is the work of God: to trust Me, to put your faith in Me and not in how hard you work. I'd say to my friend, "Hey, stop trying to be good enough. Stop trying to be religious; you're not very good at it. Stop knocking religious people because they're not very good at it either." I'd say to my friend, "What you need to do is you need to ask Jesus to feed your soul because right now your soul is filled with pride. You think you're better than these religious people and right now your soul is probably filled with a little fear. How is this going to end up?" Don't work harder. Ask Jesus to feed your soul. Jesus says:

For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to Me and believes in Me will have eternal life." [John 6:40]

I hope my friend hears that and says, "All right, let's talk about this." I told you that this story, this particular meal story doesn't end well. Some of them do, but this story does not end well. The crowd gets angry at Jesus and says, "Who do you think you are?" Jesus has to leave them again. Our natural inclination is to resist changing our diet, to resist the offer of the bread of life. For some of you, you don't want to leave the food of Egypt for the bread of life because it sounds so narrow and nobody in our society wants to sound narrow-minded, do they? It sounds so narrow-minded that Jesus says, "I am the only bread of life. I am the only thing you need and I am the only way to get to it." That sounds so narrow-minded, but what if 3+3 did not equal 7? Would I be narrow-minded or would I be telling the truth?

The second reason I don't think many people switch over to the bread of life is because Jesus says, "Trust Me." How can we trust Him? The Jews said, "We're not trusting you as God...we know your mom and dad. We've seen you when you were a squirt. How can we believe that you're God?" We have the other problem don't we? We don't trust Jesus to be God because we don't know Jesus and the reason we don't know Jesus is because we're not spending time eating the bread of life—and that's not about going to church, although that helps. Chewing on the bread of life means opening God's word and hearing God speak to you. It means spending time with friends who are not religious, but are trying to follow Jesus. It means seeing what God wants you to do and doing that instead of what you want to do. It may mean something as simple as going out for a long walk and saying, "God help me." Maybe the most sincere prayer you make all winter: God help me! Eating the bread of life is what gives us life.

The third reason a lot of my friends have not switched over from Egyptian wonder bread

is because it's in the American character to want to do something. You have worked hard, you own your own firm. You have worked hard, you're retired. You have worked hard; you've got this great family and a good reputation. I want to do something if only to show that I'm good enough and that God is fair. Thank God, God is not fair. That's what I'd say to my friend. You better pray that God is not fair, or you and I are in a lot of trouble. I want to do something good and Jesus says, *I don't want you to do something good. I want you to come to Me and trust Me.* You know, in the end in this story the only ones that come back for more of the Jesus food are the losers. They're the prostitutes, and the sinners, and the crooks, and the ones with bad reputations, because for them this sounds like good news. You mean I don't have to earn my way in? Good, because I can't earn my way in. They're the only ones that say, "Give me some of that bread, would ya?" And the ones that spend a lot of time with Jesus—His followers—when the rest of the crowd goes away, Jesus turns to them and says, "You going away too?" And they said, "Jesus, where else would we go? Only You have the words of eternal life. Only You have the bread of life."

How's your spiritual diet today? Are you eating the bread of life or are you starving to death on Egyptian junk food? Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, I thank You very much that You want to comfort people that are afflicted. That when we pray like Rich did for people that are afflicted, You want to offer them comfort and You say, "Come to Me all you who are weary and broken down and I'll give you rest." You want to comfort the afflicted, but on days when we're pretty comfortable, you want to afflict the comfortable. You want to wean us off of Egyptian junk food and help us taste and see that the grace of God is embedded in Your word to us and the love of God means I don't have to compare and I don't have to work hard. I have to trust Jesus. I pray for my friends here who are going to out to a good meal and whether they're feasting or fasting this week, I pray that You offer them the bread of life and fill their soul with love that will not let them go. Bless us all in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Spirit. Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.