



WESTMINSTER  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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# **The Journey II: What Is It**

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**Exodus 16:4-12 (NASB)**

<sup>4</sup>Then the LORD said to Moses, “Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day, so that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction. <sup>5</sup>On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily.” <sup>6</sup>So Moses and Aaron said to all the sons of Israel, “At evening you will know that the LORD has brought you out of the land of Egypt; <sup>7</sup>and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, for He hears your grumblings against the LORD; and what are we, that you grumble against us?”

**The LORD Provides Meat**

<sup>8</sup>And Moses said, “This will happen when the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening, and bread to the full in the morning; for the LORD hears your grumblings which you grumble against Him. And what are we? Your grumblings are not against us but against the LORD.”

<sup>9</sup>Then Moses said to Aaron, “Say to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, ‘Come forward before the LORD, for He has heard your grumblings.’” <sup>10</sup>And it came about, as Aaron spoke to the entire congregation of the sons of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. <sup>11</sup>And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>12</sup>“I have heard the grumblings of the sons of Israel; speak to them, saying, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God.’”

**John 6:32-37 (NASB)**

<sup>32</sup>Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. <sup>33</sup>For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven and gives life to the world.” <sup>34</sup>Then they said to Him, “Lord, always give us this bread.”

<sup>35</sup>Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; the one who comes to Me will not be hungry, and the one who believes in Me will never be thirsty. <sup>36</sup>But I said to you that you have indeed seen Me, and yet you do not believe. <sup>37</sup>Everything that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I certainly will not cast out.

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**What Is It**

My husband Bill’s family is from Bellefonte, PA, just outside of State College. We love to go for weekend visits. Bill is one of seven children and our weekend visits are full of family time, lots of dogs and fabulous family meals. His stepmother, Gloria is an excellent cook. She is Lebanese and cooks in the traditional ways. She spoils us with delicious dinners every time we visit. Baking is her specialty. When our daughters were young, we were in the habit of leaving on Sunday afternoon, following a huge Sunday lunch to return to Pittsburgh. When Gloria realized we were packing up, she would say, “Let me give you some food for the road.” I would protest, “The drive is only three hours

really we just ate, no snacks necessary.” It did not matter; we were taking food with us in the car. Moving into the kitchen Gloria would begin to make sandwiches and then pack chips, pretzels and if we were lucky her homemade baklava, tea cookies and Reese’s peanut butter cookies- because these were a favorite of my daughters. We would only get three miles away from Bellefonte to Milesburg, when a voice in the car would pipe up, so what did Grandma put in that bag? Immediately, the food bags were opened, and we were all snacking on the goodies.

Her food satisfied our slight hunger, but even more it brought a message of care and love for our trip home. In this Lenten time, we discover that in the ordinary places, God too daily provides and meets our deepest hunger in life.

We begin with the Israelites, God’s chosen people, who were slaves in Egypt for four hundred years. Moses was ordained by God to bravely address Pharaoh and demand that the people be set free, by order of God alone - the great I Am. Following the plagues and seasons of hardship and miracles, the Jewish people were released when the angel of death Passovered their homes. Immediately the chosen people grabbed all they possessed and left Egypt to journey out toward the Promised Land. Their travels led them directly into the wilderness.

Having traveled a few days, one morning Moses and Aaron heard the people outside of their tent. This was no social visit. The people were hungry, worried and they wanted action. “Where are we going, how long

will we be out here and what are we going to eat?," they demanded. Given that my family was hungry three miles from Grandma's house I was not surprised to hear the Israelites were complaining and fretting about their stomachs along with their fate. Wilderness living was daunting to everyone.

God heard their cries and provided for their needs with quail every evening and manna every morning. Manna is a white flaky substance that appears on the thorny bushes. The manna was taken and rolled up to make bread. No one had ever eaten this before, so they called it, "What Is It?" translated Manna. For the next forty years, every morning, the manna was provided by God. On Friday, twice as much was given because on the Sabbath no manna was found. Everyone was to rest in observance of the Sabbath. Manna was the wilderness food of the Israelites, sustenance provided by Almighty God.

Today you can get a taste of manna too. Go to the Sinai Peninsula and live with the Bedouin and their camels. These are people who live off the land. They still gather it and bake it into bread, which they still call manna. After scientific studies, the conclusion is that manna is flakes from the land lice that feed on the local tamarisk trees. The sap decays quickly and attracts ants, so a daily portion is the most anyone gathers. Does this sound familiar?

How do you interpret the miracle of manna? Does the manna miracle hold up if we find a scientific response? Or is the miracle that God heard the complaining of a hungry people and directed them to a food they never

would have found on their own? What really makes bread from heaven?

Theologian, Barbara Brown Taylor invites us to examine our response.<sup>1</sup> “How you answer this question has a lot to do with how you see God in your life. If your manna must drop straight out of heaven looking like a perfect loaf of butter crusted bread, then chances are you are going to be hungry a lot. When events do not go as you think they should, you think God is ignoring you or punishing you or you might begin to ponder. God, are you not there? On the other hand, if everything that comes to you comes from God then there will be no end to the manna in your life. Nothing will be too ordinary. We discover it is not what we receive each day that matters, but who sent it.” The miracle is that God is always sending us some blessing every day, some bread, some clothing, some joy, some hope.

Together, we have been going through a wilderness season ourselves this past year. Traveling through a bleak terrain, bewildering and lonely. Sometimes it is easy to identify how you arrive in a desolate place—down paths with names like COVID or Loss, or Depression. It is natural to want to get on the other side of our wilderness experiences quickly and leave all of this behind. Before we get too far away, we do well to consider how God has journeyed with us. Even now, God is providing for us and fortifying us, even in this bizarre wilderness season. Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be

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<sup>11</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor, *Bread of Angels*, (New York: Cowley Publications, 1997).



hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. (John 6:35) Jesus knew to feed people for a meal of a season is to leave them hungry, even if the feeding was a great miracle. Jesus taught the divine truth; Moses was not the bread maker; God gave them the bread. Today we live because God is our companion. Jesus came to be bread of life – the source for spiritual nourishment, the source of joy and contentment in any situation, in plenty and in want, in easy times and in times of struggle and challenge.

In the last analysis, whether we recognize it or not, our ultimate hunger is for acceptance by and fellowship with God. When by faith we receive his life into our very being his life begins to nourish us and he abides in us and we in him. Today, as we leave church and enjoy a meal where bread is served in so many ways, give thanks to the One who provides for us continually. On this journey of Lent we find the One who brings life to the entire world.



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