**Springfield Presbyterian Church**

**August 1st, 2021**

**The Bread of Life**

1. Manna From Heaven

As I read this passage from John, I was led to think about the

deep historical ties that we have to Manna. As a Westernized woman, I’ve always thought about Manna as bread, because that is seemingly the easiest way to construct the narratives of the Old Testament in my head. We see Manna as the food of the day, in Deuteonomy, in the Psalms, in Numbers, in Exodus, and then later on in the New Testament in this text as well as Paul’s 1st Letter to the Corinthians. Manna seems to span across large passages of time, it seems to be incredibly important – but what does it look like or taste like and why is it so crucial?

The only way I could consider it was rather absurd – this idea of sourdough loafs and challah falling on people’s heads from up above – I think that would be more alarming than hopeful or encouraging. And now, especially as we come to the Communion Table and we break this bread together, it gives me pause consider what our ancestors ate as sustenance.

So, I went down a rabbit hole – I put on my detective’s cap and looked more into Manna. Manna is still eaten today in modern Iran and if you go down to the Museum of the Bible in D.C., their café features Manna as a garnish.

We don’t really know the full details of what Manna might be, but it is thought to be coriander seeds, maybe raw honey, perhaps a sweet beetle cocoon…which seems less appetizing. Yet it is life giving, life sustaining, and is given from God and part of the wonders of the Earth. In the Old Testament texts, we hear that the Israelites would be given manna from heaven and it was very clear that they could only take what they needed for the day, except for Friday where they could take two days of manna, for the purpose of Sabbath. You were not to waste it, you were not to think of it as extraneous or abundant in a way that meant is means less to you. It also was given daily, so a very real sense that folks were to trust that God would provide, they wouldn’t need to hoard it, because God would always grant this Manna to God’s people – God promised that they would not be hungry or thirsty.

1. The Bread of Life

So when I hold the bread that we break during communion, it begins to take on a whole new

meaning. It’s more than the bread that we got at the bakery, it isn’t endless, it will spoil, and the meaning it carries is more than the weight of the bread itself. From our ancestors until this day, we acknowledge that we are not to take this bread, nor wine, for granted. It is provided, a provision that we neither deserve nor earn, but are granted out of love from the God who always cares for his beloved people.

1. Signs

When the disciples are speaking with Jesus in our passage, it makes sense, from this very

Historical sense of Manna that this is what they want – they want that as the sign or the seal that Jesus is really God. They want to know what they need to do, what acts they need to perform so that they are faithful disciples. And I love Jesus’ answer, because it sounds so easy and so simple and it truly is a gift – all tied up in one word: “Believe.”

The very human part of me wants to reply to Jesus and ask for a five step path that is clear and concrete – here’s exactly what you need to do. And yet again, Jesus uses that one word and he uses it throughout the Gospels: Believe.

There are folks that I have met in my life who seem to believe without questioning or constraint, they know God’s love so firmly that nothing could ever shake them from their faith. It’s amazing to watch and see and hear these folks – because their faith is not naïve nor easy or wrapped up in black and white thinking – but rather, it is this sense that is absolute. What any of us would do to have a faith like that – a faith so unerring, so imbued, so constant.

For me, it is encouraging to see the disciples waver. I’m grateful that the disciples aren’t perfectly perfect in every way – they struggle with their faith, they ask questions, they want concrete answers. It offers us, in our humanity, the opportunity and permission to be curious about our faith. It leads us to question upon question, especially ones that the text today evokes: Why is manna a life-giving sign? How do we put down our desire to prove our faith and simply believe? And particularly relevant today, how do we understand the magnitude of this bread that is synonymous with life itself?

1. Questions

These are all good questions, but in a few moments, I know as I raise the bread above my

Heart and break it, that it is much more than bread itself in that moment. In that moment, it is blessed, it is a sign and seal and symbol of bread as Christ’s body and bread as a constant sign of God’s promise to provide always – from the Israelites manna experience to this sanctuary as we share this meal.

The question I have for you this morning is no small feat, but it’s worth some time in reflection and consideration. When you take this bread, when you drink from this cup – which you do every month, what does it mean to you? What do you find meaningful in this experience, this experience that is tied back to the very beginnings of our faith history?

I know we have these small, individualized wafers and cups and it can feel a little bit like the sacred magic of communion is removed for the sake of safety, but I encourage you to try and still seek that sacred moment all the same. I also think about the time that we had to provide our own communion elements in our Zoom worship, and how in moments that could be wine or juice or tea or coffee and our bread could be a nacho, a cracker, or rice – common things became holy and as we share in communion this morning, let us see God’s gifts so freely given as something more than its substance.

In the moment of communion, are you compelled to remove yourself from tasks or proof or deeds and simply believe that the God of all times and all places has provided from the very beginning and will continue to provide today? Can we recognize the provision of Manna, how meaningful it was for our ancestors, and carry its meaning into today? As you sit, as you pray, as you hear the words of old, words that are spoken across the world in Communion, can you feel the warmth of Christ and the community of Christ in your very bones?

Let us come together and share the bread and wine. Let us see the historical ties that sit on this table and are broken for you and for me. Let us make this communion experience an expression of our willingness to tear down our desires for concrete steps and simply breathe and believe. Amen.