



**Sermons from St. Marks  
United Church of Christ  
New Albany, Indiana**



**When the Manna Stops**

**Text: Exodus 16:2-15**

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The story of Exodus is a story of liberation. The story begins with Moses being sent by God to deliver a message to the Pharaoh. "Let my people go."

The events that follow, like many stories of liberation, are many and complicated. There are 10 plagues, there is a fleeing into the night during the Passover. There is the drowning of the Egyptian Army and a journey through the desert.

And the people protested that it would have been better to remain in Egypt and died in the Passover than it was to starve to death in the desert. Thus God sends quails into the camp at night so the people have meat to eat; and bread, manna, in the morning, so that people have bread to eat. It is a story of God caring for His people. It is a story of caring for the most basic and essential need that people have. They are going to be nourished.

Behind and beyond this story, however, lingers a burning question. What happens when the manna stops? What happens when God no longer provides the basic needs of the people within them doing anything? What happens when God demands that the people take the next steps? What happens when God demands His people begin to mature spiritually?

What happens when the manna stops?

The question is not only relevant to the Israelites and their journey, but to us as well. When do we begin to mature spiritually?

This, to me, is a significant question. It is easy to say that we are going to follow Jesus; it is, however, something we need to reflect on as time goes by. What happens when the manna stops? What happens when we are called to become more mature in our faith?

And, ultimately, it leads to the question: What does a mature faith look like?

There's obviously a lot more than two things, but today I want to share two things about having a mature faith. I learned them from a Spiritual Director, an incredibly wise man, when I was in college. He talked to me a great deal about these two things. I often wondered if he

thought I was slow as he kept repeating them. As time has gone on, in life, I realized that it wasn't my ability to grasp the concept of maturity; it was the ability to enact it that was more difficult.

The first principle is a statement about prayer and working. It is, "Pray like it all depends on God; work like it all depends on you."

The premise is this. If you have important tasks to do and important decisions to make, take them to God in prayer. However, don't just do that. Work hard at it. Do not presume that God is going to do all your work for you.

A reporter was once observing a very difficult university professor, watching the professor interact with students, the students interact with the professor, and how the students did in the man's class.

One day when there was an exam the reporter noted that a good number of students bowed their heads in prayer before taking the exam. The reporter asked the professor if praying seemed to help the students.

The professor said, "Well, it's like this. It helps the A students a great deal more than it helps the C students." God, he was saying, might have been a part of the process, but the students' studying was a huge part of it.

Sometimes we like to blame faith on being lazy. I'll let God handle it.

I've known people in my own profession who claim that they are more spiritual than many because they don't write their own sermons, but they stand in the pulpit waiting for the Holy Spirit to touch them. Many of the members of their churches have found themselves to be highly disappointed with the power of the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit seems to speak in rambling, incoherent terms. Or maybe it's just the pastor who didn't prepare.... The Holy Spirit does help, but helps a lot more when you do the work entailed in writing a sermon.

And working is just no lifting another person's work.

In the 20's and 30's one of the most famous and influential preachers in the country was a man named Harry Emerson Fosdick. He was a person who was highly regarded and highly published. One day he went to church and listened to a very young preacher preach a very, very fine sermon.

The thing about this very, very fine sermon that the young preacher preached was this. He was using one of Fosdick's sermons verbatim. His preparation was to retype one of Harry Emerson Fosdick's sermons and to preach it as his own.

When people were leaving Worship that day Fosdick asked the young preacher how long it took him to write the sermon. The young preacher smiled and said, 'three hours.'

Fosdick then said, "Hmm, that's quick. When I wrote that sermon it took me over 20 hours." The lad was caught not working like it all depended on him.

A great sense of spiritual maturity is praying fervently, but working hard. God uses us and if we don't do the work, the work of God doesn't get done.

The second piece of maturity is this. "If you think that the whole world is dumb and that the only person who has a clue as to what is going on is you, then you are the problem." The problem isn't the world and it isn't other people, it's confronting ourselves honestly and forcefully.

Learning to confront ourselves honestly, and be accountable to ourselves and the world, is sometimes very difficult. It requires having a sense of profound humility. It requires recognizing that there is wisdom that lives beyond our understanding. Sometimes the truth is hidden.

There is a story about two angels. One was the senior angel and the other was the apprentice. As the senior angel and his apprentice traveled, they stopped at the home of some rude, very arrogant people and asked for a place to stay.

The very arrogant were not terribly thrilled about having visitors, but they gave the two angels a small, wretched room in the back of the house.

When they got into the room, the senior angel noticed a hole in the wall, looked into it, and immediately fixed it.

The apprentice looked up and asked, "Why are you fixing these people's house when they have been so rude to us."

The senior angel said that some times the truth is hidden.

The next night they two angels stayed in the home of some poor people who lived in a farm. They were treated by this impoverished family to a wonderful dinner and given a comfortable room in which to sleep.

During the night they were awakened by crying. It seems that one of the family's cows at died.

When the two angels left the apprentice said to the senior angel—I don't get you. You fix the wall of people who are rude to us and you let a cow die which belonged to people who were so good to us. What is with you?

The senior angels said, "Sometimes the truth is hidden."

"You see, in the home of rude very arrogant people, I saw a vast amount of gold behind the wall. I fixed the wall so those people would never find the gold.'

"During the night, in the home of the poor people, the angel of death came to take the farmer's wife with him. I told him to take the cow instead."

Sometimes the truth in life is hidden. When we are truly humble, we can embrace that.

The story of the Manna is a story of God caring for His people. It is, also, however, a reminder that there will be a day when the Manna stops; a day when we are invited and urged to step forward not only as a people who have faith, but a people with a mature faith.