

## John 6:22-35

When I was in High School I had the opportunity to take a career exploration class. Having the desire, at that time, to go into law enforcement, I spent some time riding around in a police car. I joined the officer as he patrolled the town late into the evening. It was a town of 2,000 people in west-central Missouri, and making those rounds with the officer convinced me that I did not want to become a policeman. All he did, hour after hour, was to shine his light into store windows, check to make sure all the doors were locked, and keep a watchful eye on the neighborhood. I wanted to see a crime in action; to be a part of a police chase; to investigate a break-in. I soon realized, however, that if I pursued a career in law enforcement, most of my time would be spent not in dramatic, adventurous ways, but in the plain, ordinary pursuit of keeping the peace.

Most people, like teenage boys, have an eye for adventure. We shun the ordinary and go for the gusto. We prefer movies that thrill us to boring narratives. We like fireworks that light up the sky. We notice fancy, expensive cars and homes, but pay little attention to those that are quite common. A fantastic sunset will draw our gaze, perhaps even a camera shot, but most evenings we pay no attention to the setting of the sun.

This desire for adventure is not confined to our physical senses; it tempts us spiritually as well. Churches are always competing with each other...newer and more exciting ways to worship, flashier billboards, more modern architectural designs, more and better enticements to attract newcomers...because they know that people like adventure even in their spiritual life. Who wants to be bored in church? Who would want the plain and ordinary when they could have the new and exciting?

And so we can understand somewhat why the crowd gave Jesus the third degree in our text. They found Him near Capernaum and began questioning Him. "Hey! How did you get here? When did you get here? We didn't see you get into a boat!" And when He told them to believe in Him whom God sent, they kept at Him. "Well, what great sign do you do that we should believe in you? Our fathers ate manna in the desert; can you top that? What sign can you show us?"

Just the day before, Jesus had fed more than five thousand people with only two loaves and two fish. But that was too plain and ordinary. Had He smacked His hands together and caused lightning to flash and through that caused a smorgasbord of food to appear before all the people, that would have grabbed their attention. But breaking off pieces of bread and fish to have His disciples give to the people? Even though it was a miracle, that's not going to excite anyone.

But Jesus was never one to incite drama and adventure. He healed the sick not with wild waves of His hands, but quietly, usually away from the crowds. He did not create loud thunderstorms where He went; He stopped the thunder and told the winds and the demons to be still. Even the dead He raised not with pomp and circumstance, but with plain, ordinary words, "Young man, arise...Lazarus, come out." Let's face the fact that with Jesus, what you get is not a flashy, exciting miracle-worker, but a plain, simple, ordinary Man sent by God to save those who are lost.

Now if you want dramatic, and exciting, and adventurous, don't look at Jesus, rather look at God in His judgments. Sodom and Gomorrah, now that was exciting! Raining down fire and brimstone from heaven to destroy them all. The Great Flood, more exciting adventure! Destroying in a dramatic way all the wicked unbelievers on the face of the earth. How about Mt. Carmel! God striking Elijah's sacrifice with fire and then Elijah killing in judgment all the prophets of Baal with his sword. No

wonder the Apostle Paul warns in First Corinthians about excitement in worship. "I'd rather speak five (ordinary) intelligible words about Christ," he says, "than ten thousand (dramatic) words with a strange tongue." Exciting tongues, he says, are for judgment; but the good news of Christ is plain and simple. The crowd seeking Jesus told Him they wanted a sign; a sign to prove that He was sent from God. Yet, had He given them the sign they were looking for, it would have been a sign of judgment, not mercy; a sign of wrath and punishment, not a sign of grace.

It's no secret that smaller, traditional churches are losing members to larger, more contemporary ones. But this should not surprise us. People want gusto, not the ordinary; programs, not the plain truth about sin and grace. Today people are given a choice. Why eat the same manna week after week when you can go somewhere else and eat all types of delicacies? For forty years God fed the Children of Israel with bread from heaven. "What's this stuff?" they asked when it first appeared. And thus came the name, manna. Manna simply means "what is this?" At first it was okay. It fed their mouths and kept their tummies from growling; it nourished their bodies. But after a while they grew tired of it. It was too plain, and simple, and ordinary. They wanted food that was new and exciting. In Numbers 21:5 they grumbled against God, "We detest this miserable manna!" Okay, God said, you want excitement? You've got it! He sent fiery serpents everywhere among the people and many of them died. The story of the snakes is much more dramatic than eating plain manna day after day. But the manna was an act of God's mercy; the snakes were sent out of judgment.

When it came to Jesus, the crowds wanted a dramatic sign to prove to them that He was from God. But that dramatic sign will not come until Christ returns in Judgment. On that day they will get the excitement they're asking for. But it will be to their sorrow, not to their delight. For as the heavens and the earth are being destroyed in a dramatic way, in the way of Sodom and Gomorrah, they will be whisked away by Satan to their eternal misery.

If you want a sign not of judgment, but of grace, look to the ordinary, simple Man, Jesus Christ who is God in the flesh, and to the work of God He is doing in your midst. As He spoke to the crowds then, so He speaks to you today. Not with flash and drama, but with words you understand; words that may not excite your senses but which put His Spirit to work within you. "I forgive you all your sins," you heard Christ say earlier through the mouth of His servant. Nothing flashy; just the plain truth that God is merciful to you. "Take and eat..." you will hear in a few minutes; "Take and drink for the remission of your sins..." Not delicacies to excite the tongue, but plain, simple bread and wine for your mouth and with it, Jesus' flesh and blood for your salvation. The hymns we sing together will never be nominated for awards on Broadway or in Hollywood, but the words they proclaim, though plain and simple, put Christ upon your lips and within your heart.

All that we do here week after week, after years and decades, may seem to be pretty mundane and boring. It's not deer hunting. It's not a police chase. It's not like sunbathing on a sandy beach. It's just manna. It's bread from heaven. Nothing too exciting to the senses. Nothing too dramatic. But that's because God is here in mercy, not judgment. He is here to forgive, not punish. It's because Jesus is here, and with Jesus, what you get is not exciting drama; you get an ordinary Savior--one who spread out His arms and died for you; one who made you His own in the plain, simple water of baptism.

Like most people we are tempted to seek the dramatic. You will not find that here. But you will find Christ; or better said, he finds you through His ordinary means of grace--His Word and Sacraments. Like the Israelites we are tempted to become bored with the same old manna that we get here Sunday

after Sunday. But the manna is Christ. It's how God fed His people through Moses; it's how He feeds you today.

I did not realize this back when I was in High School, but I do now. The most exciting part of a policeman's job is the worst part of it. When he has to turn on his siren, and chase a suspect, and pull out his gun, he has to act in judgment against wrong-doers. The policeman would much rather that his town lived in peace and that he never had to use force against anyone there.

And so it is with God. Though you and I deserve wrath because of our sins, He prefers mercy over punishment; grace over anger. Be thankful that the manna you get here each week is given plainly, simply, without drama and adventure. For God is here acting in mercy. He is here forgiving your sins. He is here giving you life with Christ. He is here making certain of your salvation. It's not a dramatic thing...it's God's ordinary way of working as He works in you with the words of Jesus. What is this? It's manna. It's the Bread of Life...Jesus Christ for you here and now. Amen.