

## Exodus 16:2-15

It can be interesting to learn the etymology, or origin, of a word or phrase. For example, the word “gobbledygook.” It was invented in 1944 by Maury Maverick, a Texas congressman. He used it to describe most other politicians who were “always gobbling and strutting around like turkeys.” Or “bear hug,” which came from the belief that bears killed their prey and other bears with giant hugs by rearing up on their hind legs.

In our Old Testament lesson for today we see the origin of the word “manna.” Manna was the bread that covered the camp of the Israelites each morning on their journey through the desert to the Promised Land. God called it bread, but the people called it manna...not because they took out their microscopes and their chemistry sets to study, analyze, and then give it a name. They called it manna out of their ignorance. The first morning that this fine, flake-like bread covered the camp, they were asking each other, “*What is this? What is this stuff?*” That is what the word means. Manna literally means “*What is it?*”

The answer to the question, manna, (what is this?), was not a lengthy thesis paper which Moses wrote and then distributed for all the people to read. He simply said, “*It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat.*” I imagine Moses felt the same way that many--no, strike that--that all of you mothers have felt when you tried a new recipe in the kitchen, and then when your children sat down and saw the food on their plate, they asked, “*What’s this?*” And wasn’t your response something like, “*Just eat it; it’s your supper!*” For the Israelites, this was it. There was no menu from which they could choose a food item that looked the most appealing. The manna was it. If the people did not eat it, they would go hungry. So rather than ask endless questions about it; rather than bicker and complain about it, God wanted them to stop talking and start eating.

Luther understood the same thing about the Lord’s Supper. In the Catechism, the first question he asks is, (“What is this?”) “*What is the Sacrament of the Altar?*” And Luther does what Moses did. He points us to the truth that this Supper is for us to eat. “*It is the true body and blood,*” he says, “*of our dear Lord, Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ Himself, for us Christians to eat and drink.*” When Jesus gave the Supper to His disciples...to His church...He did not say, “Take and examine,” or “Take and debate over it,” or “Take and question why I’m giving this to you and why you even need it.” He simply says, “*Take and eat...take and drink.*” And yet how often don’t we, like the Israelites, keep calling the Supper not bread from heaven, but manna...What’s this? What’s it for? Why do I need this so often? Manna...we question, we hesitate, we object to what God gives us, to what we are simply, in faith, to eat.

Now we know what this bread is. It is not manna. We do not come up to the altar asking, “What is this?” We know and believe that this is Christ; that He gives us His true body and blood under the bread and wine. And so, since the Sacrament is Christ Himself, when we debate over it, we are debating over Christ. When we complain about the Lord’s Supper, we are complaining about our Lord. When we push His meal away from us, we are pushing Him away. When we think we can go without the Sacrament, we are thinking we can go without Jesus.

Now Christ, the true Bread from heaven, is not manna in the sense that we don’t know who He is, that we have to ask, “Who is this?” Yet in some ways He is like manna. Let me explain. In the desert the manna fell from heaven without a sound, with no fanfare. It came. It was there for the people to eat. And so Christ the Bread from heaven comes to you, but there is no mighty rushing wind, no charismatic speaking in tongues...nothing but the sound of the church bells ringing and the organ

music playing. But like God's people then, you rise up in the morning, you come to God's House and Christ is here for you to eat--here in the Word for your ears, here in bread and wine for your mouth.

In the desert the people had no choice but to eat the manna. If they wanted to live, the manna was the food that God gave them. And so for you. Jesus Christ is set here before you. He is the Bread of Life. Not one among several others. Christ alone is the way to heaven. Salvation is found in His name alone. The people of old complained over and over about the manna as time went on. And so do we. It's the same thing Sunday after Sunday. The same hymns. The same creeds. The same Scripture readings. We use the same words in church year after year. Many out there have turned away from the same food on their plate each week. You can find churches where they do not use hymnals, where creeds and confessions are done away with, where the focus is not on Christ Jesus, but on man--on our works, our feelings, our love, our service to God. But friends, God gave manna to the people then. He gives the Bread of Life to you today. It's not steak and pie. It's bread. Our church service will not draw in those who want excitement in their worship, but if you want Christ--if you want what God gives, not what man gives--then you are in the right place.

The manna in the desert was for all the people. And so for you. It matters not who you are. The greatest and the worst. The richest and the poorest. The old, the young--all are welcome. Jesus is here for all. The only thing is...you must be hungry. If you have little use for a Savior, little use for the truth of God, then there is nothing here for you. But if you know you are a wretched sinner and you hunger for forgiveness; if you hunger for the life that God alone gives, then here is the Bread of Life, here is His word to you: I forgive you all your sins. Be at peace, for God is at peace with you. No matter how dreadful your past life; no matter how long since you have eaten of Christ, He is here now for you. Eat His words. Eat His flesh and blood for you.

Do not delay. The manna in the desert would melt away if the people delayed in gathering it. And so for you, Christ is here now. Today is the day of your salvation. Do not put Him off. Do not wait for your deathbed. A young woman was killed just days ago in Washington while she sat at a stoplight. No warning. No time to repent. Death came quickly. But life is here now for you. "*Whoever comes to Me,*" says Jesus, "*I will never cast out.*" Repent of your sins and believe in Him. He is your Savior. He died and rose again for you. He does forgive you right now, today.

It is now morning. You are God's people. He is feeding you the Living Bread. It is falling from heaven into your ears and will soon be placed into your mouth. Take this Bread and rejoice that God gives you such a gift--His only Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.