

# PENTECOST II

## Proper 13 - Year B

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*Note: During the 2024 Season after Pentecost, Sermons That Work will use Track 2 readings for sermons and Bible studies. Please consult our archives for many additional Track 1 resources from prior years.*

### Exodus 16:2-4, 9-15

<sup>2</sup>The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. <sup>3</sup>The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and ate our fill of bread, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

<sup>4</sup>Then the Lord said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not.

<sup>9</sup>Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites: 'Draw near to the Lord, for he has heard your complaining.'" <sup>10</sup>And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud. <sup>11</sup>The Lord spoke to Moses, <sup>12</sup>"I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.'"

<sup>13</sup>In the evening quails came up and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. <sup>14</sup>When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. <sup>15</sup>When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat.

### Commentary from Erica Andersen

Today's Old Testament lesson offers insights into our relationship with God. God has liberated the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, from a life of constant labor and oppression. The Israelites complain and imagine that things were better in the past, reminding us of our tendency to fail to appreciate God's gifts and blessings in our lives. They also remind us of our tendency to be anxious that God will suddenly abandon us.

Despite their miraculous rescue, the Israelites began to wonder where the next meal would come from. They doubt God's faithfulness. They worry that he delivered them out of slavery only to let them starve in the wilderness. However, God proves over and over to be faithful. Despite their lack of faith, God has mercy on them and provides food for them. He gives them quail in the evening and then manna, a mysterious bread-like substance, in the morning.

God continues to keep the promise that God made with their ancestors, the promise to bless this people and to bless the world through them. God is faithful, and God has provided what they need. Like us, the Israelites are growing in their faith; they must learn to trust in God's goodness and faithfulness. When we are unsure of what tomorrow will bring, this story is a reminder that God's faithfulness is everlasting; God keeps God's promises. In spite of our doubts, God will not abandon us.

### Discussion Questions

Have there been times in your life when you could relate to the Israelites' worries about being abandoned by God?

It is easy to be distracted by worries about tomorrow. What are some ways to practice gratitude so that we can stay focused on God's faithfulness to us?

## Psalm 78:23-29

- <sup>23</sup> So he commanded the clouds above \*  
and opened the doors of heaven.
- <sup>24</sup> He rained down manna upon them to eat \*  
and gave them grain from heaven.
- <sup>25</sup> So mortals ate the bread of angels; \*  
he provided for them food enough.
- <sup>26</sup> He caused the east wind to blow in the heavens  
\*  
and led out the south wind by his might.
- <sup>27</sup> He rained down flesh upon them like dust \*  
and winged birds like the sand of the sea.
- <sup>28</sup> He let it fall in the midst of their camp \*  
and round about their dwellings.
- <sup>29</sup> So they ate and were well filled, \*  
for he gave them what they craved.

### Commentary from Erica Andersen

Today's segment from Psalm 78 directly refers to today's passage from Exodus. This segment of the psalm focuses on God's power, faithfulness, and provision. Verse 25 in particular stands out. It begins, "So mortals ate the bread of angels." The term "bread of angels" reminds us of the unearthly quality of manna. It is like bread, but not quite bread, like frost, but not frost. It is bread raining down from the opened "doors of heaven," sustenance from God's kingdom entering into our earthly realm, nourishing God's people.

The second half of verse 25 tells us that "he provided for them food enough." God satisfies their needs in an unexpected way, a way they had never imagined, by scraping this mysterious substance off the ground. Physical nourishment is accompanied by spiritual nourishment, as God offers the Israelites the opportunity to learn to trust in God's faithfulness and provision.

### Discussion Questions

Can you think of a time when God met a need that you had in a way that you had never imagined?

## Ephesians 4:1-16

4 I, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, <sup>2</sup>with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup>making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace: <sup>4</sup>there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, <sup>5</sup>one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup>one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

<sup>7</sup>But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. <sup>8</sup>Therefore it is said,

“When he ascended on high, he made captivity itself a captive;  
he gave gifts to his people.”

<sup>9</sup>(When it says, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? <sup>10</sup>He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) <sup>11</sup>He himself granted that some are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers <sup>12</sup>to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup>until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. <sup>14</sup>We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming; <sup>15</sup>but speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup>from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

### Commentary from Erica Andersen

Today's epistle passage details a major theme of the books of the New Testament, and that is unity. God has called us to be one with our brothers and sisters, to come together in Christ as one body, to function as one body. The Christian life is both individual and corporate. God gives people individual gifts and callings to build up the community.

We are called to the difficult work of trying to find common ground with those who are different from us, those who come from different cultures and ethnic backgrounds, different ages, different social classes, and different political points of view. The early church had to come together across social barriers in order to survive. Sometimes, unity among Christians may seem like an impossible goal; taking small steps toward reconciliation and understanding can help it seem less daunting.

Paul also calls Christians into growth in faith, another important New Testament theme, especially in the epistles. Christians are called to continually mature in their faith through study and service, allowing the Holy Spirit to transform us into people who resemble Jesus more each day.

### Discussion Questions

How do you see your church community as working toward unity among Christians? In other words, what kinds of diversity are present in your community?

How are you nourishing your Christian faith these days, or how would you like to grow in faith?

## Mark 6:24-35

<sup>24</sup> She went out and said to her mother, “What should I ask for?” She replied, “The head of John the baptizer.” <sup>25</sup> Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, “I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter.” <sup>26</sup> The king was deeply grieved, yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. <sup>27</sup> Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John’s head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, <sup>28</sup> brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. <sup>29</sup> When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb. <sup>30</sup> The apostles gathered around Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. <sup>31</sup> He said to them, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. <sup>32</sup> And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. <sup>33</sup> Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. <sup>34</sup> As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he began to teach them many things. <sup>35</sup> When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, “This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late.”

### Commentary from Erica Andersen

In today’s Gospel lesson, Jesus teaches that “Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” Jesus teaches that his miraculous feeding of the crowd was a physical sign designed to point to a deeper, spiritual truth. This shows that God works through the real world in order to reach us. Jesus also teaches that manna, given by God to his people in the wilderness, was a physical sign that offered a spiritual meaning. Like the manna that rained down from heaven, Jesus has come down from heaven; God’s kingdom is bursting forth into our own world. Only through Jesus can our most profound longings for meaning, truth, and unity with God be satisfied.

### Discussion Questions

Feeding is a theme that runs through the Old and New Testaments. How do food and faith connect in your life? How do you feed others, and how do others feed you, both physically and spiritually?

When you take communion, do you ever think about the manna in the wilderness, or Jesus feeding the crowds?