

Lutheran Church of the Master  
580 Kuhn Road, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188  
Curt Gerald, Interim Pastor  
August 1-2, 2009  
"Gather Around the Word: Be the Change"

John 6:24-35 (New International Version)

<sup>24</sup>Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus.

<sup>25</sup>When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?"

<sup>26</sup>Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. <sup>27</sup>Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."

<sup>28</sup>Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?"

<sup>29</sup>Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

<sup>30</sup>So they asked him, "What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? <sup>31</sup>Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'<sup>[a]</sup>"

## Exodus 16

<sup>1</sup> The whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt. <sup>2</sup> In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. <sup>3</sup> The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the LORD's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death."

<sup>4</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. <sup>5</sup> On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days."

<sup>6</sup> So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "In the evening you will know that it was the LORD who brought you out of Egypt, <sup>7</sup> and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?" <sup>8</sup> Moses also said, "You will know that it was the LORD when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the LORD."

<sup>9</sup> Then Moses told Aaron, "Say to the entire Israelite community, 'Come before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling.' "

<sup>10</sup> While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the LORD appearing in the cloud.

<sup>11</sup> The LORD said to Moses, <sup>12</sup> "I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, 'At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.' "

<sup>13</sup> That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. <sup>14</sup> When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. <sup>15</sup> When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was.

Moses said to them, "It is the bread the LORD has given you to eat. <sup>16</sup> This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Each one is to gather as much as he needs. Take an omer <sup>[a]</sup> for each person you have in your tent.' "

<sup>17</sup> The Israelites did as they were told; some gathered much, some little. <sup>18</sup> And when they measured it by the omer, he who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little. Each one gathered as much as he needed.

<sup>19</sup> Then Moses said to them, "No one is to keep any of it until morning."

<sup>20</sup> However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell. So Moses was angry with them.

<sup>21</sup> Each morning everyone gathered as much as he needed, and when the sun grew hot, it melted away. <sup>22</sup> On the sixth day, they gathered twice as much—two omers <sup>[b]</sup> for each person—and the leaders of the community came and reported this to Moses. <sup>23</sup> He said to them, "This is what the LORD commanded: 'Tomorrow is to be a day of rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD. So bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning.' "

<sup>24</sup> So they saved it until morning, as Moses commanded, and it did not stink or get maggots in it. <sup>25</sup> "Eat it today," Moses said, "because today is a Sabbath to the LORD. You will not find any of it on the ground today. <sup>26</sup> Six days you are to gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will not be any."

<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather it, but they found none. <sup>28</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, "How long will you <sup>[c]</sup> refuse to keep my commands and my instructions? <sup>29</sup> Bear in mind that the LORD has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where he is on the seventh day; no one is to go out." <sup>30</sup> So the people rested on the seventh day.

<sup>31</sup> The people of Israel called the bread manna. <sup>[d]</sup> It was white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey. <sup>32</sup> Moses said, "This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Take an omer of manna and keep it for the generations to come, so they can see the bread I gave you to eat in the desert when I brought you out of Egypt.' "

<sup>33</sup> So Moses said to Aaron, "Take a jar and put an omer of manna in it. Then place it before the LORD to be kept for the generations to come."

<sup>34</sup> As the LORD commanded Moses, Aaron put the manna in front of the Testimony, that it might be kept. <sup>35</sup> The Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a land that was settled; they ate manna until they reached the border of Canaan.

<sup>36</sup> (An omer is one tenth of an ephah.)

<sup>32</sup> Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. <sup>33</sup> For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

<sup>34</sup> "Sir," they said, "from now on give us this bread."

<sup>35</sup> Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."

Have you ever had that feeling ... the feeling that the Israelites had out there 15 days into their trek to the promised land. They are hungry ... they are tired ... so they start grumbling (nothing is worse in Scripture than grumbling) ... and they wish they could go back to where they came from .

They forgot the whole story ... about Abraham and Sarah leaving their home to follow God ... about Joseph being taken as a slave into Egypt which ended up as the free ticket for Jacob and the family to come down to eat for hundreds of years instead of dieing in the famine ... they had already forgotten in not even three weeks about the frogs and locusts and first born ... they had already forgotten about the Passover blood and the meal and the promise ... and now they are wishing they could go back!

Just think, if they had know the journey would take 40 years, Moses would probably have had a mutiny on his hands ... and maybe, if the people hadn't so often chosen to grumble, the journey wouldn't have taken 40 years ... it might have been more of a non-stop flight than one filled with irregular layovers so that God could refocus his people.

Because God had brought their ancestors down to Egypt for a purpose ... and now God was calling his people out of Egypt for a purpose ... for they ... and they alone ... were called to change the world ... but in order to do so, they would need to trust God.

The quail and manna wasn't a lot ... but it was enough to keep them going ... and go they must. Turning back was not an option ... it might have been the easiest route ... like former Governor Palin quoted a couple weeks ago: "we're not retreating, we're just leading in another direction." To lead in the direction back from which we have come is not leadership ... it is cowardice ... in God's eyes.

So, a thousand years later or so, Jesus is continuing to lead God's people on the journey (which, by the way, is the journey that you and I are still on) ... and his disciples ask for a sign ... because I suppose they were daily being plagued with the same doubts that the Israelites had as they followed Moses ... "are we sure? How can we know? Does he know what he is doing?" A little dog and pony show would have been nice ... a sign ... even maybe a little quail and manna sent from heaven.

And Jesus said: "I am the bread of life ... follow me." And follow him they did ... and follow him we must.

But it is hard to follow when we don't know where we are going ... because one of the things that you and I like to do and to be is: in control! But, as the saying goes, if you live saying that "God is your co-pilot, you're in the wrong seat!" God is not your or my

personal assistant. God doesn't need a co-pilot ...the only question is "are you onboard with your seat belt fastened because God has planned quite a flight for us... and sometimes we're going to encounter a lot of turbulence!"

Retreat ... going back ... leading in another direction ... is always an easy option.

I remember a year ago I was preaching at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Schaumburg ... I filled in for the retiring pastor and for the new Interim Pastor for three different Sundays. I had served that congregation for 13 years and those 13 years are sometimes referred to as "Camelot." Pastor Paul and Pastor Jay and I served together ... and those were great years. So last year, several of the folks who had been around a long time came up to me after the worship services and said: "Oh, Pastor Curt, why can't we call you to be our Pastor again." And I said: "No ... you know we can never go back ... in order to go back to Camelot we'd have to raise a few dozen from the dead, get a couple hundred to transfer back, get Paul and Jay to leave their calls at Upper Arlington and Worth ... (now I could add we'd have to get Michael and Laurie Benschish to come back ... and Janis Tremelling ... and the Kohutkos ... and several other folks who are members of this congregation) ... because they were all a part of Camelot ... but just like Camelot, that doesn't exist any more. There is only one way to go ... and that is ahead ... and God will provide ... because as good as the past was, the future will always be better. No ... it might be an easy out ... but it would never work.

You see, God is calling you and me not just to talk about change but, as this T-shirt says, to BE the change. Our God is not a God of the status quo. Our God is not a God of the past. Our God is the God of creation who creates out of nothing ... who continues to imagine what might be ... and who calls you and me to leave the certainty of the familiar for the uncertainty of the unknown in order that God might change the world because ... you see ... only God knows what God is doing.

You and I are invited to bet the farm on nothing more certain than faith. I'm sure many people here have asked why our congregation isn't like Willow Creek or Crystal Cathedral or some of those other ... well ... I think I can tell you why ... this congregation has not yet placed its bet! I doubt this congregation has yet done anything that it didn't think or know that it could do. If the budget indicates the money is there to do something ... then probably you have been willing to do so. But have you ever done something knowing that there is absolutely no way that it can be done?

Bob Schuller, at the Crystal Cathedral, reminded us year after year about their decisions to build the various buildings on their campus ... again and again the contracts were signed with no one having a clue how they could pay for them. Again

and again, ministries were formed and staff were hired with the same kind of uncertainty. And the story of both congregations is: God has never failed them yet.

They both witness that if a congregation knows it can do this or that because it already has the funds for it ... then God doesn't even have to show up. But when congregations step out in prayer and in faith into those ministries that are seemingly absolutely impossible ... then God will show up.

And that is the kind of Change that God was seeking the Israelites to be ... that Jesus was calling the Disciples to be ... and that God needs you and I to be.

On Tuesday morning I made a side-trip on my way to this congregation. I went to Evanston Hospital to see two friends ...

Dave ... a Rotarian friend of mine ... he is about 30 years younger but shares my love of biking except that he is still an active biker ... he crashed in a race three weeks ago today was back in the hospital to have blood drained from his lung.

Marilyn ... who when she was a new member at Ascension was also one of the oldest members. After she took the spiritual gifts inventory that we asked new members to take, she said "Pr Curt, all I can do is make coffee." And make coffee she did ... she was the queen of hospitality ... she became the heart of the congregation ... shortly afterwards, she met Dick and the two of them were married after I retired. Since a former pastor shouldn't provide ministerial service in a congregation (s)he has served, I had the privilege of walking her down the aisle with her brother (who had been a member of POP in Schaumburg) and I sang for their wedding.

A little over a year ago she was diagnosed with leukemia ... she participated in some studies but her number kept going in the wrong direction ... I used to see her when I served as an on-call chaplain because she was often in the Kellogg Cancer Center on days when I was filling in. We talked about faith and hope and reality ... she knew that her death was imminent ... she hoped for another Christmas ... but worked real hard just to get last year's taxes done.

She developed pneumonia last week which was apparently the last straw for her condition ... and as I entered her room in the ICU on Tuesday they were getting ready to start the morphine drip which would usher her into the Kingdom of God. Marilyn and Dick and I prayed ... I thanked God for our friendship ... I asked Marilyn to give Jesus a high five for me ... and I said I'd see her in heaven. When the minister of health and the current Interim Pastor came in, I left the room again knowing that pastoral professional ethics required nothing less. She died that afternoon.

I believe that I'll see Marilyn again in heaven. I believe that she is delivering a message to Jesus right now from her friend Curt. I believe that God is leading the Church on a journey. I'm willing to be my life on it ... that is why we have been tithers for almost forty years ... those \$15,000-20,000 a year could have bought a lot of flights, cruises, houses, or cars ... but the investment in eternity is a much better deal!

That is why I know that God will bless the call process of this congregation ... and that God is raising up somewhere in this Church a new pastor to provide leadership into the future ... that is why I know that even going backward would be more comfortable going forward will always be more productive for God.

Do you agree?