

## **Pastor Roy's Sermon from March 18, 2012**

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Israelites were tired of living in the wilderness and longed for the good 'ole days of slavery in Egypt. We're thirsty and we hate this detestable food! Sounds like students or inmates talking about cafeteria food. Except this time for the Israelites, judgment falls! Danger and death all around with these fiery snakes. They cry out to God for help. A bronze serpent is created and all who looked to it are saved. For the Israelites, looking is turning back to God—turning back with hope and gratitude.

We can see a cycle in this story. The Hebrews are grateful in the beginning but then become ungrateful. They don't appreciate the gift of each day. Manna is a lesson in gratitude. The Hebrews could not provide food for themselves in the wilderness. So every morning they could gather enough to last a day. If they gathered too much, it went bad, got wormy, and smelled. On the day before the Sabbath rest, they gathered twice as much and all was fine for two days. They had to resist the urge to stock pile manna. They had to trust that tomorrow morning there would be enough, again. Day by day, a gift from God. God provides enough to get them through the wilderness. There is plenty.

But even “enough” can get old. Gift becomes expectation. But true gratitude says, this is enough, I can be satisfied with this. So the Hebrews in the wilderness teach us a lesson about human nature and about judgment.

The Israelites fall under the judgment of their ungratefulness and begin to die. Ingratitude brings death. There are many forms...many degrees of death. We die in our spirits. We die as we grasp for what is out of our reach. . .as we focus on things rather than people. . on conquering rather than stewardship of all that God gives.

Freely we receive, freely we give. And as we share and care for one another through personal giving and even taxes, the life we give away truly is our own. Like the Israelites in the wilderness, God took care of them on God's terms. They could freely receive with gratitude or grumble in misery. Don't we have the same choice before us?

God calls us to be manna people--to live with gratitude and share abundant gifts with all of creation.

We have enough, God gives enough of what we truly need so that can live and share these manna gifts with others. One of our challenges as affluent Americans is that we know little of true need. When was the last time you saw someone who was starving to death—who only needed some rice and beans and maybe a bit of meat to go in living? I've known hungry people, but not starving. So we focus on our health because that is the one thing we cannot totally control. We share this planet with many people who are more concerned about rice and beans, than about health care.

What does it mean to be manna people? To freely receive and freely give? It's a challenge when our nature and instinct is to be control people. To manipulate, to arrange, to order so that we have more than enough by our own power even if that means others don't have enough.

Then comes Jesus, dying on a cross, being the serpent on a pole—or the man on a tree. Sooner or later, we can't save ourselves. Our finely ordered worlds come crashing down around us. We're left with broken pieces, woundedness, and despair. We cannot save ourselves. We have to give ourselves

over to the God of the cross man Jesus. It's ugly. It's powerless. It's definitely not in control.

We will always struggle to control. And we will always feel that control slipping between our fingers. And every single time that happens, the cross God will visit in our time of need, if we have not become too calloused to true need. If we cannot accept help, we will not look to the serpent on the pole, to the man on the tree. We will go our own miserable way, lost, forsaken, by our own choosing.

Today is the day to embrace the life of the one Jesus who came not to condemn, but to love, to serve, to heal, to feed—to bring our daily manna.

Jesus releases his life on the cross. Jesus is the manna man. He teaches us by his willing death what it means to live, to love. Jesus teaches us what it means to be. Not clinging to tomorrow's bread, or his own need to survive, only doing what he can to show what it means to be a manna person. Trusting, being, serving, and letting it all go. . .for love.

Lord, teach us to trust you daily—so that we may be manna people for our sisters and brothers, for our neighbors, and for those who live on the other side of this planet. Amen.