

“Give us this day our daily bread.”

Exodus 16:1-12, 31 and Matthew 14: 13-21

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A Sermon Preached by Reverend Debbie S. Osterhoudt

Today we are continuing our look at the Lord’s Prayer. Specifically, the phrase “Give us this day our daily bread”.

We are now at a turning point in the Lord’s Prayer. Thus far we have been getting our hearts and minds and wills in line with the great purposes of God - Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed it be thy name. God’s kingdom come, God’s will be done. I can remember when I was in elementary school science class the day when we learned how to make a magnet. Do you know how to do it? If you repeatedly stroke the nail in a single direction with a magnet, the inner forces in the nail will get lined up and straightened out and the nail, for a short time will become a little magnet, with its own power to draw and attract. So it is when we get our wills aligned with God’s will. That’s what we mean when we pray “Your kingdom come. Your will be done. Your name be hallowed.” Hopefully, by first focusing on who God is and God’s will for our lives, we become aligned with God’s purposes for all of life. That’s why Jesus has us begin our prayers looking beyond ourselves to God.

We turn at this point in the Lord’s prayer from our concern with God’s kingdom, will, and God’s name to our concern for our affairs - our bread, our sins, our temptations. Though we begin with God’s great purposes, we ought not end there. God invites us to

move on to our own needs.

So now we pray for God to give. Give. But we must be willing to truly receive, which means we must be open to the gifts of another. Most of us would confess that we are much better givers than we are receivers. When we are on the receiving end, we believe ourselves to be obligated, indebted somehow, to the giver. The ultimate selfishness and immaturity, says Dr. Al Winn in his book “The Christian Primer”, is the refusal to receive. If we cannot learn to receive like little children, we cannot enjoy the love of God or the love of our fellow human beings. To be whole and healthy human beings necessitates our ability to receive from our Creator God and from other people.

We pray for God to give, to us. Not to me. To us. We pray that not only will we receive from God what is needed for our sustenance and survival, but that all God’s people will receive the same sufficient bread. It is amazing to me how easily we discount or ignore the needs of others. We Americans comprise 6 percent of the world’s population and consume two thirds of the world’s resources. Our desire to accumulate creates scarcity for the rest of the world. Do we think globally when considering who the “us” is when we pray for God to give to us our daily bread?

We pray for God to give us our daily bread. There is some controversy among scholars concerning the Greek word that we interpret as “daily”. It is a mystery word, occurring only in this Lord’s Prayer; nowhere else in the New Testament is the word used. How we translate the word implies whether our daily bread is physical bread/needs or spiritual nourishment. Maybe it is two sides of the same coin and means both.

We cannot be spiritually fed unless we are also physically fed.

Two stories in scripture describe the bread which God gives to us which is necessary for our survival.

Let's listen to both stories and take note of their similarities, which I believe is intentionally written.

Read Exodus 16 and Matthew 14.

In the gospel story, Jesus is surrounded by 5000 people in the wilderness - it is supertime and there is no food. The disciples, not wanting to be responsible for the sustenance of so many, request that Jesus send the people away to find their own food. Jesus insists that the disciples have a responsibility to share and provide for the physical sustenance of the gathered people. Much like God will provide for the Israelites in the wilderness in our Old Testament story. The food God provides for the Israelites is called "manna."

"Each day the people shall go out and gather enough manna for that day", God told Moses. One day's worth, no more, because manna would not keep. If the people tried to hoard it, it spoiled overnight. In the morning it stank and crawled with worms. When the sun got hot, it melted. So their limit was two quarts of manna per day per person. They were to gather only what they needed; what was sufficient for life. That way everyone would have enough. And, I believe that the people who learn to trust in God to provide for them on a daily basis so they did not have to fear scarcity and hoard.

This lasted forty years, or fourteen thousand six hundred days. Manna was the

Israelites' food in the wilderness. They ate raw manna, boiled manna, baked manna, ground manna. It became the symbol of God's very physical, practical care for them. Manna was an everlasting reminder of their dependence on God, who gave them each day their daily bread.

There has been much speculation over the years about exactly what manna was. The Bible says it was "like coriander seed, white and the taste of it was like wafers made of honey." The name comes from the Hebrew which means "what is it". People in the Middle East continue to gather and bake it. The flakes themselves come from plant lice that feed on the local tamarisk trees. Because the sap is poor in nitrogen the bugs have to eat a lot of it in order to live. They excrete the extra in a yellowish-white flake or ball of juice which is rich in carbohydrates and sugars. It decays quickly, so a day's portion is the most anyone gathers. Was manna a miracle from God or bug juice? The bottom line is that it was considered bread from heaven. And really, is it the thing itself or the one who sends it that matters so much to us? Manna reminds me of grits.

As a child of the south, I ate grits for years without knowing what they were. I ate cheese grits, buttered grits, grits with pieces of bacon stirred in. Finally, when I was about 10 years old, I remember asking a friend of mine if he knew what grits were. "The truth?" he said, grinning wickedly. He told me that grits were small bugs that lived in colonies on the surface of fresh water lakes, like algae. At the end of every summer, they were harvested and dried in the sun. Whenever I hear about the manna, I think grits.

If your manna has to drop straight out of heaven looking like a perfect loaf of bread, then chances are you are going to go hungry a lot. When you do not get the miracle you are praying for, you are going to think that God is ignoring you or punishing you - or worse yet - that God is really not there. You are going to start comparing yourself to other people and wondering why they seem to have more to eat than you do, and you might start complaining to heaven about that. Meanwhile, you are going to miss a lot of other things God is doing for you because they are ordinary - like bug juice - or transitory - like manna.

If, on the other hand, you are willing to look at everything that comes to you as from God, then there will be no end to the manna in your life. I think of it as a manna mentality, recognizing God's good gifts to us on a daily basis. Bug juice will be manna. Grits will be manna; nothing will be too ordinary or transitory to remind you of God. You will be grateful for God's daily provision for your well being and the well being of other people.

It is not what it is that counts but who sent it, and the miracle is that God is always sending us something to eat. Day by day God is made known to us in the simple things that sustain life - some bread, some love, some breath, some water. But it is easy to forget who sends us the gifts of life. I imagine that if we visited any of our homes and opened the cupboards - besides seeing who is neat and who is not - we would see cans of food and refrigerators so full that every time you open the freezer door, the frozen green beans fall out. It is our manna insurance just in case God does not come through.

We all need to be on the manna alert. Because asking for our daily bread is more about who God is and what we trust God to do in our daily lives than it is about just food. When Jesus fed the 5000 in the wilderness, it reminded them of the manna and Moses. What is miraculous about that story is that those 5000 people had the resources among them, once those resources were shared, to feed every man, woman and child to the point that they were all satisfied and had food left over. Jesus invites us to adopt an attitude of abundance. Our ability to share is directly proportionate to either our attitude of abundance or fear of scarcity. God has blessed us abundantly and will continue to bless us, not that we might hoard those blessings, but in order that we might share those blessings with God's community. Give us this day our daily bread - the gift has already been given and God intends that we share it.

I challenge you to be on the "manna alert" this week. How is God providing for US on a daily basis?