

Give us This Day our Daily Bread  
Exodus 16:2-4; 9-18

In our Scripture from Exodus the Israelites are a little over a month removed from Egypt. They have followed Moses out of Egypt, across the Red Sea and into the wilderness. They have left behind the place where water and food was plenty and now find themselves in a place with no food and they are seriously considering that life in enslavement in Egypt truly might have been the better lot to what they face now. So they are complaining to Moses and Aaron...

Exodus 16:2-4, 9-18

- 2 The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.
- 3 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 fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."
- 4 Then the Lord said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instructions or not.
  
- 9 Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, 'Draw near to the Lord, for he has heard your complaining.'"
- 10 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.
- 11 The Lord spoke to Moses and said,
- 12 "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.'"
- 13 In the evening the quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp.
- 14 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.

- 15 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.
- 16 This is what the Lord has commanded; ‘Gather as much of it as each of you needs, an omer to a person according to the number of persons, all providing for those in their own tents.’”
- 17 The Israelites did so, some gathering more, some less.
- 18 But when they measured it with an omer, those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed.

Bread. With respect to our gluten intolerant brothers and sisters, bread just might be one of the universal staples in the world. Most cultures have some sort of “bread like” staple – whether it is loaves or bagels or pita; na’an or croissants, or rice cakes, tortillas, flatbread or even biscuits – most cultures have some type of bread. Bread plays an important role in our sermon today.

Here at Fort Hill we are in the middle of a season of prayer. For 90 days we have covenanted to pray together – to help us discern how God is speaking to us. We are using a short devotional book as a foundation – and it is never too late to be a part of this process. Books are available in the narthex and we encourage you to join us if you have not already. As a part of that journey, our sermons for several weeks are focusing on the Lord’s Prayer – broken down into the various phrases. From previous sermons, we understand the first part of this prayer where we give honor and glory to God and pray to align our wills with God’s and today we move into the petitions of the prayer...

If you haven’t read the sermon title today – and even if you have - today we explore the phrase – “Give us this day our daily bread”. Taken alone it sounds rather like our Israelite brothers and sisters who we encounter in this morning’s Scripture. They are hungry and are frustrated by the lack of resources...so frustrated that they actually think enslavement in Egypt looks better than where they are now. They are hungry, tired and scared. They have heard about this better life that Moses and Aaron keep touting...that God will be bringing and based on what they are seeing and experiencing right now, they seem to be doubting their decision to follow Moses and Aaron out of Egypt and they blame Moses and Aaron for taking them away from a place they wrongfully remember as being far better than this.

But God hears their cries and responds with food! God tells Moses, “I will rain down bread from heaven” And indeed bread rains down in the form of a flaky, starchy substance called manna. The Israelites were to gather as much as they needed for the day – enough for everyone in their household for the day. No more or no less. And they discovered there was more than enough for everyone. Everyone had enough.

If we were to read on into the verses that follow, we would learn that there were some Israelites who made the choice to collect more than they needed - to hoard it if you will - only to learn that when they went to use it, it had spoiled and become full of worms.

But God's grace abounds...and the next day after the fog lifted, manna again appeared on the ground. And all collected enough manna for their households for that day. And so it went every morning (excluding the days of Sabbath) for forty years. For fourteen thousand, six hundred days the Israelites collected and ate manna each and every day. And after those forty years in the wilderness – when they crossed into the Promised Land – God called them to keep a jar of manna that would not spoil in their homes to remind them of their time in the Wilderness when they trusted God and God provided for them each and every day.<sup>i</sup>

God used something as mundane as bread to communicate to the Israelites that God wanted to be a part of their everyday lives and God called them to trust God...to be obedient to God...to rely upon God each and every day. God clearly wanted them to know God is interested – not only in the dramatic moments of their lives like surviving the various plagues in Egypt and crossing the Red Sea in a dramatic fashion - but also in their day to day basic living. By placing their trust and reliance upon God providing their daily bread, the Israelites came to realize they needed God. They discovered they could not sustain themselves alone.

God continues to use bread in everyday basic situations to symbolize the ways he wishes to connect with God's people and help them realize they needed God: in the feeding of the five thousand when 5 loaves of bread and 2 fishes fed all 5000 present with baskets of bread left over (LK 9:10-17); in the breaking of bread at the Passover meal as the disciples joined together for a final meal at the Last Supper (MT 26:26-29); in the recognition of the risen Jesus Christ upon the breaking of bread when he dined with the two men that he had met that day on their walk to Emmaus (LK 24:13-35); in the very claim that Jesus makes that he himself is THE bread of life sent from heaven for all the world (JN 6:34-5). All of which are passages that witness to a God who continues to call us into a daily relationship.

Today when we pray the petition, "Give us this day our daily bread" we pray for our basic needs. We pray for God to give us what we need – we pray that we won't go hungry; we pray for homes that are dry, and warm and safe; we pray for shoes to put on our feet and we pray that our children are safe and never in need. When we ask God for our basic needs, we own that we need God – we own that we need God's help each and every day even in the most basic areas of our lives. And when our lives and our will rely upon God each and every day we are able to recognize God is the one who is the source and provider of each good thing and every blessing in our lives including our daily bread. When we rely upon God, we are able to move beyond our own selfishness and our own expectations and live into the life God wishes for us....a life full of God's blessing; a life where we claim God and a life where God claims us!

When we pray the petition, "Give us this day our daily bread" we are praying for our own selves and the needs of our own families but we can't forget that this prayer is communal by nature. Our prayer for daily bread includes praying for daily bread not only for our own

families and our brothers and sisters next to us in the pews, but also for those down the street, in the next town, the next state, even those across the country and the oceans...and into those places where manna doesn't seem to rain down from the heaven ... into those places where very little food or clean drinking water, not to mention shelter or medical care of any kind seems to be present in any way, shape or form.

When we pray for daily bread – we understand that God doesn't just rain manna all over the world and we all just simply must go out and collect what we need. No our reality is that there are persons in places where daily bread appears to be thrown away because it has not been eaten...yet there are places where bread is not plentiful and sometimes not even existent. For In our world there are places where a child dies every 5 seconds from a hunger related issue. That's 16000 children a year dying because they don't have daily bread.<sup>ii</sup> What we can't forget is that when we pray this prayer, we are praying for each and every child of God (no matter what their age) to have daily bread.

While there may certainly be times we don't feel like it, am reminded often that most of us in this congregation are quite blessed. Most of us have access to food, running water, shelter, education, clothing, medical need and the like. Most of us have the privilege of choosing what wear every day and not only choosing what we eat but how often. And I wonder if there is a point where it is somewhat disingenuous to have extra in the area of basic needs and then to keep asking God for more. If we have our daily bread and then some...maybe our responsibility shifts to making sure others are getting their daily bread...their basic needs. Perhaps God equips God's people with minds and gifts of bread, and money and self, to participate in the giving and distribution of daily bread.

I don't often expect to find religious advice in Dear Abby. However yesterday, I did just that. In yesterday's paper, Dear Abby had this question from a 15 year old. Evidently she attends a wealthy, private school where "everyone" gets a really nice car for their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday. Her dilemma is that she has an older – 2001 – compact economy car that she knows she will be ridiculed for driving. She is conflicted knowing she should be thankful but the fear of being made fun of appears to be too difficult to face. So she is writing Dear Abby to ask for advice. Here is what Abby writes in response: "You need to grow up. You're crying poverty with a loaf of bread under both arms. You attend a private school which isn't cheap, and your parents have given you a car. Be grateful for what you have, most teens are not so lucky."<sup>iii</sup>

The lines between basic needs and abundance can become quite blurry in our world which is constantly encouraging us to compare ourselves to one another....and continues to tell us we all need more. If we listen to the world we all need a faster phone, the bigger TV, the better house, and on and on and on. But God's world runs contrary to all of that. If we take the bread that we need and only the bread we need then there is plenty – with some left over. But we must remember our world differs greatly from that of our Israelite brothers and sisters...we understand that God's children are spread far and wide and ...and by the nature of trusting God ...God calls us to participate in the giving of daily bread and not just to those sitting next to us on the pew.

Ellsworth Kalas tells a moving story about the giving of bread...

During the bombing raids of World War II, thousands of children were orphaned and left to starve. The fortunate ones were rescued and placed in refugee camps where they received food and good care. But many of these children who had lost so much could not sleep at night. They feared waking up to find themselves once again homeless and without food. Nothing seemed to reassure them. Finally someone hit upon the idea of giving each child a piece of bread to hold at bedtime. Holding their bread, these children could finally sleep in peace. All through the night the bread reminded them, "Today I ate and I will eat again tomorrow."

Sleeping with Bread, Holding What Gives You Life, p.1

When we pray for God to "give us this day our daily bread" – we are praying for the God to give us all what we need...

My hope for all of us is that in this prayer we find the bread to hold on to...and bread that can be broken and shared with others so that all have plenty.

All Glory and Honor be to God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit...Amen.

Mary Cunningham Gause  
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<sup>i</sup> Bread of Angels, Barbara Brown Taylor. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. Lanham, Maryland, p. 9.

<sup>ii</sup> [www.bread.org](http://www.bread.org)

<sup>iii</sup> "Dear Abby" Abigail Van Buren. Anderson Independent Mail, Anderson, SC. Saturday, February 19, 2011.

Other sources used:

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