

Five Petitions: #3 Daily Bread

Once again, our text is the gospel Lectionary reading from July 28.

LUKE 11:1-4 (NRSV) *He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples."² He said to them, "When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name.*

*Your kingdom come.
3 Give us each day our daily bread.
4 And forgive us our sins,
for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.
And do not bring us to the time of trial."*

I think of the story of Israel in the wilderness following their exodus from the fleshpots of Egypt. They ran out of food, and began whining to Moses, "Were there no graves in Egypt? Did we have to come out here in the dessert to die?"

So, the Lord said to Moses (EXODUS 16:4 NRSV): *"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."*

The bread was called manna, and was described as a white flaky substance that appeared after the morning dew had evaporated. The instructions were to gather each morning just enough for that day—an omer per person. You know an omer? It's a tenth of an ephah. It's about 3½ pounds.

When someone gathered more than an omer per person, it turned rancid and was not edible. Those people went hungry that day. It was a test: gather just enough for today, and trust God for tomorrow. *Give us each day our daily bread.*

Bread is such an important element in the Scriptures. It was basic nutrition in a relatively barren and primitive land. And it was a token of friendship and hospitality: to share bread was to seal a relationship, and to break trust after sharing bread was the ultimate betrayal, which adds special poignancy to Judas' betrayal of Jesus. The sealing of a relationship—the establishment or the reaffirmation of trust. *Give us each day our daily bread.*

And bread is seen in Scripture as a gift from God: manna from heaven, the feeding of 5,000 with five loaves and two fishes. Evidence of the presence and gracious provision of God. *Give us each day our daily bread.*

Bread was a part of the temptation of Jesus: the Devil said, "Prove you're the Messiah. Turn these stones into bread, and the people will follow you to the death." Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone." There's more to life than physical gratification. *Give us each day our daily bread.*

Jesus used a story about bread to illustrate the freedom God's people have under the law. On a specially dedicated table in the Tabernacle and later the Temple were 12 cakes or loaves of bread called the "Shewbread," or the "Bread of the Presence." They were offerings to God, changed every Sabbath. To touch or meddle in any way with the Shewbread was strictly forbidden, under penalty of death.

The behavior of Israel's first king, Saul, as described in Hebrew Scriptures suggests strongly that he suffered from bipolar disorder that became psychotic, with fits of paranoid rage. He directed his rage at David and David was running for his life. Tired and weak from hunger, he took refuge in the Tabernacle, and ate some of the Bread of the Presence. As we know, David didn't suffer from that act, and went on to become a great king—a man after God's own heart.

When Jesus' disciples plucked corn on the Sabbath, the Pharisees shouted, "Unlawful! Unlawful!" and Jesus responded, don't you remember when David *"entered the house of God and took and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and gave some to his companions?"* And he said unto them, *"The Son of Man is lord of the sabbath."*

When Mark tells the story Jesus' closing comment is. *"The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: ²⁸Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath."* (MARK 2:27-28 NRSV)

Bread, then, becomes a medium for Jesus to affirm freedom, not from the law, but within the law. God's law is descriptive, rather than proscriptive. It describes the standards by which humanity may respond and relate to the presence of God and in relationship with each other. But humans tend to make laws ends in themselves: obey the law because it's the law, not because obedience accrues the benefit intended by the law in the first place. And if we think we can avoid the predictable consequences of disobedience... well, how fast do you drive in a 55 mph speed zone? Give us each day our daily bread.

Quite likely the most well-known and most beloved bread metaphor is recorded in the 22nd chapter of Luke: *"Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."* (vs. 19)

I remember the way this scene is played out in "Jesus Christ, Superstar:" The disciples are oblivious: feeling the buzz from the Passover wine; lost in their own dreams of kingdom and power and wealth—"Jesus, can we be Vice President and Secretary of State when you come into your kingdom?"

Jesus takes the bread, and says, "For all you care, this bread could be my body. For all you care, this wine could be my blood. If you would just remember me when you eat and drink."

Today we took bread "in remembrance of Him." Remembrance. Jesus' body has not been on earth in almost two millennia—certainly not in our lifetime or in our experience. What does it mean for us to remember Jesus when we take the bread?

Does it simply mean we have sentimental thoughts—that I reminisce on the sufferings of Jesus and feel really thankful or really awful? Is it just vague mental activity? In the Bible, a call to remember—especially when tied to a covenant sign

or ceremony—like the breaking of bread—is a vibrant, powerful, participatory process in which we recalibrate our lives in synch with what's being remembered.

"In our Western way of thinking, 'remembering' means recalling to mind something that is no longer a present reality. But in the Jewish way of thinking, for example, in the Passover, 'remembering' means participating here and now in events that define God's presence in the past the present and the future." To remember is to participate. To remember Jesus is to participate in the life he lives and to which he calls us to live.

It's encouraging to see among younger generations a rebirth of understanding of the ongoing application of the gospel. We frequently read and hear that the gospel is believed once for salvation but is reapplied daily. The gospel rhythm isn't one-and-done but rinse and repeat. This growing awareness of what it means "to preach the gospel to ourselves daily" or to "apply the gospel" is exactly what it means to remember Jesus and to live his grace as we eat the bread. Give us each day our daily bread.

Finally, there is this wonderful story in the 24th chapter of Luke. Two men walking from Jerusalem, east to the little village of Emmaus, just across the Kidron Valley and over the Mount of Olives... They're discussing the events of the previous weekend—the crucifixion of a young Jewish rabbi—the rabid mob mentality of the crowds...

A man joins them as they walk, and begins to explain what happened and why, and to draw conclusions from the prophetic writings of their Scripture.

They arrive at their home as the sun is setting, and in keeping with Jewish standards of hospitality, one does not leave a stranger out on the street after dark; so they invite him in. They sit down to eat, and this stranger *"took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³²They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?'"* (LUKE 24:30-32 NRSV) "...burning within us..." Intense emotion related to connecting the dots and understanding what God is doing in our midst.

Jesus: remembered and recognized in the breaking of bread.

Fred Craddock was in Winnipeg to give two lectures. He gave the first lecture Friday evening. The next morning when he got up, two or three feet of snow pressed against the door. The phone rang, and his host said, "We're all surprised by this. In fact, I can't come take you to breakfast, this morning's lecture has been cancelled, and the airport is closed. If you can make your way down the block and around the corner, there's a little bus depot, and it has a cafe. I'm sorry."

I'll let Fred finish the story: "I said, 'I'll get around.' I went outside, shivering, and I slid and bumped and finally made it into the bus station. Every stranded

traveler in western Canada was there: strangers, pressing and pushing and loud. I finally found a place to sit, and after a while a man in a greasy apron came over and said, 'What'll you have?' I said, 'May I see a menu?'

"He said, 'What do you want a menu for? We have soup.'

"I said, 'What kind of soup?' and he said, 'Soup. You want some soup?'

"I said, 'That was what I was going to order: soup.'

"He brought the soup, and I put the spoon to it. Yuck! It was awful—kind of gray looking. I couldn't eat it, but I put my hands around it. It was warm, so I clutched it and stayed bent over my soup stove.

"The door opened again. The wind was icy, and somebody yelled, 'Close the door!' In came this woman clutching her little coat. She found a place, not far from me. The greasy apron came over, 'What do you want?' She said, 'Glass of water.' He brought a glass of water, took out his tablet, and said, 'Now what'll you have?' She said, 'Just the water.'

"He said, 'You have to order, Lady. I have customers that pay. What do you think this is, a church or something? Now what do you want?'

"She said, 'Just a glass of water and some time to get warm.'

"Look, there are people that are paying here. If you're not going to order, you've got to leave!' And he got real loud about it.

"So she got up to leave and, almost as if rehearsed, everybody in that little cafe stood up and started toward the door. And the man in the greasy apron said, 'All right, all right, all right, she can stay.'

Everybody sat down, and he brought her a bowl of soup. The place grew quiet, but I heard the sipping of that awful soup. I said, 'I'm going to try that again.' I put my spoon to the soup. You know, it was not bad soup. Everybody was eating this soup. I started eating the soup, and it was pretty good soup. I have no idea what kind of soup it was. I don't know what was in it, but I do recall when I was eating it, it tasted a bit like bread and wine. Just a little like bread and wine.¹

Give us each day our daily bread. Prayer Slide

¹ Fred B. Craddock; Mike Graves; Richard F. Ward. *Craddock Stories* (Kindle Locations 1212-1215). Kindle Edition.
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