

Exodus 16:1-15, 31, 34 TMB ~ Mark 8:1-9a
Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread
 4th of Six-Sermon Series on the Lord's Prayer
 August 18, 2019 ~ 10th after Pentecost ~ Indoor/Outdoor Service 😊
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Introduction to Gospel Reading:

You are about to hear, touch, and taste the *second* of our two feeding stories we get to nibble on today. In our second story we are again in the wilderness, but we are not the Israelites on their way to the Promised Land. We have time traveled up to Jesus' time, about 1250 years later. And we are the hungry crowd, again. This story is the second of Jesus' miraculous feeding stories in Mark. It is the story about the feeding of 4,000. You're probably thinking wait, "I thought it was 5,000." And you are right. The better-known story, the one that is found in all four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) was the feeding of the 5,000. But Mark has already told that story back in chapter 6, several days and miles ago in the journeys of Jesus and his disciples.

That story was by the sea. This one is in the desert. That one was a Jewish crowd; this was likely a Gentile crowd. And Mark has loaded this story up with meaning-rich numbers that stand for an important idea: 3, 7, and 4. Here's the code: Three days, is a set up for a miracle. Seven is a symbol of divine completeness, and four symbolizes the whole world (four winds, four directions, four corners of the earth).

Like in our first scripture lesson, you are very hungry and have nothing to eat. Good news, Jesus has compassion for you. When the basket comes your way, take your fill and pass it along.

Sermon:

I was hoping for sun, or at least overcast and dry, for our second annual attempt at an Outdoor Worship service. Of course, after living in Wisconsin for almost two years, I have come to learn never to count on any particular weather: Wisconsinites know to expect the unexpected. In England, however, they do expect rain. Every day. In fact, you could almost set your clock by the afternoon showers that come and go just before tea time. Or at least they did way back in 1963 when my family and I spent a whole summer in the British Isles.

True to form, it was raining at 4:00 pm the afternoon we arrived in the harbor after a 10-day transatlantic ship voyage from New York to London. The six of us went to meet my Grandmother, Gram King, who had flown over to meet us there. By this time it was pouring. As we were standing at the curb, waiting for my dad to come pick us up, all of a sudden, the wind lifted Gram's hat off her head and blew it through the air, across several lanes of traffic.

My big brother Scott, who was 11 at the time, dove through the traffic (much to my mother's horror, risking life and limb with cars traveling in the opposite direction of what we expect in the USA) much to his 11-year old delight, dodging cars right and left with zero visibility.

Scott retrieves the hat triumphantly, runs back across traffic over to Gram drenched with rain and out of breath, and presents it proudly. “Here’s your hat, Gram!” To which Gram King replied, “Where’s the hat pin?”

Today, as we take up the fourth petition in the Lord’s Prayer, “Give us this day our daily bread,” you may think we’ve finally arrived at easy street. The first three petitions, summed up as: Wow God, Change the World, Take Control, were essentially about God—who God is, the coming of God’s “kin-dom,” us choosing to give God control. The second half, the other three, shift over to what we can ask for and expect from God. Honestly—don’t most of our most fervent prayers fall into this category, “O God help me, help me, Jesus, help me now?” Prayers where we are asking God for something. The late comedian Flip Wilson nailed it with his bit on prayer, “Hey, I’m talkin’ to God right now. Anyone want anything?”

At first glance, it may seem like this kind of prayer would be the easiest of all. We all want a lot of things. And yet, we fall often fail on this one in three different ways. First, we *fail to notice* or recognize the real blessing, the divine gift right in front of our eyes: Like my Gram King’s less than joyous reunion with her favorite hat: “Where’s the hat pin?” Or like the freed, but hungry Israelites in the wilderness, “Manna, manna, what is it? What is it?” Second, we can also fail by *asking for too little*. Big overwhelming problems, like systemic racism, our national epidemic of mass shootings, our need for balanced immigration reform and the humane treatment of immigrant families, or the alarming rise of sea level due to global warming, may seem beyond the scope of prayer. They’re just too big, right? Or *we may fail to ask at all*. Some of us find it hard to really ask God for anything.

Today, as we consider this phrase, “Give us this day our daily bread,” something we have likely prayed hundreds if not thousands of times, perhaps we can learn something new about how God wants us to pray for ourselves. We will break it down into three bite-size chunks.

1st: **Give**. As grown-ups, most of us find it hard to ask for anything. Children don’t have this problem. Neither do cats. Did you ever notice how cats don’t think twice about asking you to let them out, let them in, let them out, let them in (pausing at the threshold each and every time), several times in the space of one hour. How else will they get through that door? They know they need help. So do children. But the older we get, the more self-sufficient we think we have become the harder it gets to ask. Until it gets really bad and we drop into some kind of sink hole not sure where we are: out of ideas, out of money, out of options. Then maybe, out of desperation, we might ask God.

After forty years of eating manna in the wilderness, God knew that as the Israelites stood poised on the threshold of the Promised Land, just when they thought their problems would be over, their problem with asking would begin. Check out the story told in Deuteronomy 8. They had no difficulty complaining, whining, asking when they were so hungry and tired as they slogged through the wilderness of Sin. But God knew that they just might stop asking as soon as they thought they had it made. Once they had laid the carpet and hung the drapes in the Promised land, they might forget who got them there.

2nd: **Us/our**. Did you notice that the prayer is not “Give me this day my daily bread?” God wants us to pray that all be fed. That’s right—while we are praying for ourselves, we are also at the same time, praying for all God’s children to be fed. So what does that mean for those of us who routinely throw out spoiled food from our refrigerators, or have cereal that gets stale in its box before we get around to eating it? And those of us who have so much food available that we’re stressing about whether to go Keto, Mediterranean or Paleo in order to shed the extra pounds we have gained from overeating? The us/our part of this prayer tells us that God’s economy of abundance depends on us, who have more than enough, to share rather than hoard the food on this earth.

Can you hear the call to action baked into this petition? I do. And still, as Diane Moffett, President of our Presbyterian General Assembly Mission Agency, quipped during her Triennium presentation on becoming a Matthew 25 church, “We get all we can, we can all we get, and then we sit on our cans.” When we pray, “Give us this day our daily bread,” we are praying to God to help us do otherwise. We are praying that God would shift us from a me/mine frame of mind into an us/our way of life. This shift will alter our life-style and our global footprint. In the us/our shift, we are saying, “Yes, God—I trust that you will feed me and are calling me to be your hands and feet in the work of feeding all your children.”

3rd: **day/daily**. If you keep reading the story about how God fed the Israelites with manna, you will discover he gave them just enough for the day they were on. And no more. They were instructed not to take any more than they needed for the one day. Some tried to, and that did not go well for them. “Trust me about tomorrow,” God was trying to teach them. Maybe that was the greater miracle: more than God’s provision of enough food for everyone according to need, the greater miracle was the Israelites’ ability to trust in God’s economy.ⁱ Whose economy do we trust more? The daily reading of the Dow Jones Industrial Average and the perceived threat of an “inverted yield curve,” or God’s economy of abundance and provision for all? I think this issue of trust, is what Jesus is getting giving us help with here in this first petition. I hear the call to trust God to provide and for us to share what God provides. I hear Mark reinforcing the abundant economy of God’s provision for all in this second miracle feeding story in the wilderness with his choice of numbers. The miracle, resurrection number 3, the divine completeness and perfection of the number 7, and global scale of the number 4, in the 4,000 that were fed that day.

Did you notice that Jesus used the word “day” not once, but twice in this little phrase? *This day*, our *daily* bread? I think he did this to help us remember the manna in the wilderness story, and to remember the one who feeds us, a day at a time. It’s a daily walk. Yes, we have goals and dreams that can take months, years and decades to realize. But the living out of them—the living into them, by God’s grace, happens only one day at a time. Folks in AA or NA, who are finding their way back to a clean and sober life—free of drug and alcohol dependency know that all they can really work on is one day at a time. But that is true for everyone. Everyone of us who can admit that we are here only by the grace of our Higher Power we know as the God

of Israel, our God who is our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. Again, there is a call to humility, just below the surface in this petition, as well.

We will finish my sermon together by singing a table blessing my parents taught us that I will teach you right now. Some of you may already know it. It is so simple, but it says exactly what we need to remember every time we take another bite, another step, another breath. It is excellent theology and children of God of every age can remember it because it is so short and to the point. So, I invite you now to take the hand of the person or persons sitting next to you. Please sing one line at a time as I teach it.

*God is great and God is good.
And we thank you for our food.
By your hand must all be fed.
Give us Lord our daily bread.
Amen.*

¹ Richard Boyce, "God is Faithful Everyday," *Presbyterian Outlook*, Aug. 19, 2019, p.41.