

Luke 11:5-13
July 6, 2008

South Plains
14th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Daily Bread: Just Enough

“Eat everything that Bobbi puts on your plate.”

That was the prescription for losing weight that the doctor gave my friend Godfrey. Godfrey and I met while working on campus ministry together and we saw each other at the pool occasionally. He is a good man with a good heart. He must have a good heart because he weighs well over 300 pounds and he is several inches shorter than I am. In order to get in and out of the pool, Godfrey used the ramp. When he finally was successful in shedding some of that weight, it was because he followed the doctor's orders and ate only what his wife Bobbi put on his plate. She gave him just enough for every meal. Since Godfrey's experience, I have come across several other people who followed a similar diet to get control of their waistline. They ate just enough to satisfy their hunger.

Jesus teaches us to pray for our daily bread, not food for the month, not even for tomorrow, just enough for each day. The laborers listening to the gospel in first century Palestine depended on their daily wages to buy food for that day. A prayer for daily sustenance spoke directly to their needs. We talk about living from paycheck to paycheck, but most of us don't wake up in the morning with the knowledge that unless we work that day, we will not eat. Today's lunch if we're like most

Americans will have traveled an average of 1500 miles to reach our table. We may worry about its nutrition or its cost or its flavor, but not about whether food will be available.

Yet, Jesus teaches prosperous Americans to pray “Give us each day, our daily bread.” In saying those words, we confess our need for God's provision. We may repeat the petition mindlessly, but we do it with the unconscious hope that we won't have to worry about a food crisis in our home. And, I believe we pray those words, because a food crisis quickly escalates into a faith crisis.

That's what was happening in Exodus 16. The people of Israel had successfully escaped from Egypt after the Lord sent a series of terrible plagues against their Egyptian masters. They were free and headed to the Promised Land. But, it would turn out to be a 40 year hike through the wilderness in order to get to that land flowing with milk and honey. And, the wilderness was not flowing with anything that resembled food. Quickly, their enthusiasm for freedom faded. They imagined themselves starving to death. They pined for Egypt where nostalgia convinced them that the food was good despite the enforced labor of slavery. They accused Moses of bringing them out of slavery in order to kill them.

The Lord's solution was simple. Every morning when the dew had evaporated from the ground, the

Israelites would find a fine, flaky substance that was nourishing and tasty. They called it “manna,” which sounds in Hebrew like a question, “What is it.” In the evening, quail would come down to provide meat. “Then,” God said, “you shall know that I am the Lord your God.” God instructed them to gather just enough for each day. Incredibly, although some gathered more and some gathered less, each person had just enough for that day.

Here’s the interesting part of that story for amateur naturalists: We know that region grows a wild shrub called the tamarisk. When insects attack the tamarisk, they leave behind a white, flaky substance that the people of that country will make into bread and eat. Furthermore, migrating flocks of quail have been seen to light on the ground so exhausted from their long flight that hunters can catch them for food.

The Lord’s provision for his people was probably a natural occurrence with supernatural meaning. The Lord of creation was making the bounty of his world available for the needs of his people. The point was not the appearance of manna and quail, but the Lord’s provision. God was teaching God’s people to rely on the Maker of heaven and earth. Just as the Lord rained hail on the Egyptians for punishment, he rained manna and quail on the Israelites as blessing.

For both the Egyptians and the Israelites, the question was the same: would they see the Lord at work,

or would they only credit chance? That’s the question for us every time we eat a meal. Will we see the food on the table as God’s gift?

We pray, “Give us this day our daily bread,” in order to learn to see the Lord’s hand whether in a sumptuous Sunday spread or in our school cafeteria lunch. And, if we cannot see God at work in the daily-ness of life, we will neither see nor appreciate God at work in our salvation. Like the Israelites, we need reminding of our dependence on our Creator. And, so we pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.”

Many of us have lost that sense of daily dependence on God. We have been blessed with so much affluence that getting enough to eat each day can be taken for granted. Gregory Deloatch was homeless on the streets of New York City for several years. He could not take his meals for granted. Fortunately, the churches in that city do not take meals for granted either. Deloatch reports that thanks to the churches there are enough feeding programs so that anyone can find something to eat every day in New York.

All too often, we look for God’s hand in the spectacular miracles, ignoring daily graces: an abundance of fresh air to breathe, the flash of white in a mocking bird’s wing, strength to get out of bed despite our aches and pains, the undeserved smile of a stranger. The Lord’s Prayer wants us to remember the daily-ness of our dependence upon our Maker. Of course, there’s a

lot of common sense in that reminder. People who regularly look for miraculous intervention to supply their ordinary needs, people who count on receiving a windfall to pay the bills, people who expect divine protection in spite of their own carelessness – such attitudes do not serve anyone well. When we look to God with thanksgiving for each mouthful, we nourish body and spirit.

However, there's an odd thing about human nature. The oddity is illustrated by the Exodus story of the manna God provided in the wilderness. Although God instructed them carefully that they were to gather just enough for that day, some of the Israelites could not bear to trust God for the next day's manna. They gathered more than they needed in order to save for tomorrow. Ordinarily, saving is a virtue. But, in this case, it was a reason to trust in themselves and to distrust God. When tomorrow came, the manna had worms and stunk to high heaven.

Human nature wants more than enough. We lust for the pride of telling the world, "I have taken care of myself." We ache to have more than we need. So, we accumulate more stuff. We build bigger buildings to keep the extra stuff. Then we insure it so we can replace the stuff we don't need with more stuff. The only cure for the madness is to rest and be thankful, to rest in what is given us, and be thankful to the Giver. That's what holidays and holy days are all about.

Last Friday we celebrated 232 years of American independence. The celebration itself did not change anything. We would be no less the United States of America if we had neglected to hang a single flag or shoot one rocket. But, we would have diminished ourselves as the land of the free and the home of the brave had we not remembered with gratitude the signing of the Declaration of Independence. And, we are less than the nation we want to be when do not rest in our freedoms, but give them up to take care of ourselves. Remembering secures our identity.

In the same manner, we celebrate the Lord's Supper as a remembrance. We are not remembering our conversion or our deeds of Christian service. We are remembering that God provided a Savior, that Jesus died for love of us, that the Holy Spirit nudged us toward faith and toward the friendship of Christians who support us with their love. We remember with this meal. It's not much. Just a taste.

Just enough to remind us of our need for food.
Just enough ceremony in this sacrament to confirm our responsibility for caring for all of creation.
Just enough to be thankful, so we can rest.

So Good gives us just enough.