

“Giving Us Our Daily Bread”

Give us this day our daily bread.

Matthew 6:11

My youngest must have been around four when I decided to let my family fend for themselves. Before this, every time I had to be away for a couple of days I would stock up the refrigerator with prepared delicious and nutritious meals for them to eat. But it wasn't until the last time I came home to find those meals sitting untouched in the refrigerator (because the family favored Dunkin Donut and McDonald delights over mine) that I made the vow to end any and all advance food preparations. So when Rick's little tummy started grumbling on the first day of my absence . . . and when he marched to the refrigerator to find something to eat . . . and when he opened it . . . and when he found 'Old Mother's Cupboard' quite bare . . . he was shocked and immediately shouted out the hungry boy alert. "Mom left and took all the food!"

The rule of thumb among survivalists is that humans can go three minutes without air, three days without water, and three weeks without food. And so it's no wonder that on the forty-fifth day of failing to secure enough food in the barren wilderness the Israelites started complaining bitterly against Moses and Aaron. In the eyes of the Israelite storytellers it was a crisis of both food and faith. The lessons learned about how their hunger was ended was recorded in the 'Manna and Quail' saga in Exodus 16:2-15. The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. 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." Then the Lord said to Moses, "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. On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days." So Moses and



Give Us Grace

Lord, without your gifts we cannot live. Without your grace we cannot learn to give. So give us food and give us grace that in the needy we may see your face. Amen.

Aaron said to all the Israelites. "In the evening you shall know that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your complaining against the Lord. For what are we, that you complain against us?" And Moses said, "When the Lord gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the Lord has heard the complaining that you offer against him---what are we? Your complaining is not against us but against the Lord." Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites. Draw near to the Lord, for he has heard your complaining." And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked towards the wilderness, and the glory to the Lord appeared in the cloud. The Lord spoke to Moses and said, "I have heard the complaining of the Israelites, say to them, at twilight you shall eat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread, then you shall know that I am the Lord your God." In the evening quails came up and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. 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. 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.

If we too believe that hunger is both a crisis of food and faith, what lessons can we learn from this Biblical story about how to end starvation in our time?

One is lesson on prayer. **Draw near to the Lord, for God has heard your complaint.** (Ex. 16:9) Give us food! Praying for bread acknowledges need and hunger cries unveil the truth about our common lot: we are interdependent, vulnerable, and limited beings. Eugene Petersen notes: We are creatures who are interdependent in this huge and intricate marvel of creation, where everything and everyone is related and in touch with everything and everyone else. When we pray for bread we make a decidedly un-American declaration of dependence. We renounce the silly pretentiousness of posing as a self-made person. We humbly take our places in the created order . . . it is an admission

that we can't do it on our own-- that we are not in control. The limitations inherent in need prevent us from illusions of grandeur and the isolations of selfish pride. The limitations of our created state are invitations to live in a generous and receptive dynamic in the creaturely life that teems around us. Limits don't limit us from being fully human. They only limit us from being God (Tell It Slant, p. 183-184). "Lord, give us food!" is the prayer that disarms all hidden fears and anxieties inherent in our illusion of self sufficiency. "Lord, give us food!" is the prayer that strengthens our trust in a Loving God who generously and abundantly provides from earth's resources all the food that we humans need.

Another is a string of lessons in the practice of Sabbath work and rest. **Each person is to gather as much as he needs for the day.** (Ex. 16:16). The spiritual learning here is that Gods provides what we need, which is not necessarily the same as what greedy guts want and expect to have. **Each day the people shall go out and gather enough for the day. . . on the sixth day . . . gather double.** Except for setting aside enough to eat on the Lord's day of Sabbath rest, stockpiling up and hoarding of food is forbidden. This spiritual practice serves to guard against the illusion that there is a food shortage and helps to disarm the fear that there is not enough to go around. **Take an omer for each person you have in your tent** (Ex. 16:16). In the Lord's way of ending hunger among the starving here on earth, sharing what one has with others in need is a non-negotiable practice.

There's another refrigerator Zen moment that echoes the spiritual practices that the Israelite wanderers learned. It reminds us that ending hunger is a shared human spiritual task. Buddhist Bernie Glassman taught that 'when you are hungry, instead of going to the refrigerator with expectations of finding all the food you wish to eat . . . just open the door and accept what is there. If it is peanut butter and bread, simply be happy for it. Give thanks for the food. Then divide the sandwich that you make in two and invite someone to share it with you.

(from Glastonbary lecture)