

## “Bread from Heaven”

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Ex. 16:2-4, 9-15

John 6:24-35

*‘The LORD said to Moses,*

*“I have heard my people complain.*

*Now tell them that each evening they will have meat and  
each morning they will have more than enough bread.*

*Then they will know that I am the LORD their God.”’*

*Ex. 16:11-12*

Let us pray... O God,

‘Give us this day, our daily bread’ – is just as true for modern people  
as it was for ancient people.

Food, yes, but not just food.

Grant us wisdom, courage, and peace for the living of each day.

Amen

There is an auto repair garage in North Plainfield, NJ

that is like any garage with its hydraulic lifts in grimy bays

that had assorted tools, bins, tires, and diagnostic equipment.

The waiting room had a few chairs, but at the counter was something unique –

it was a hand grenade with a plastic disk

inscribed with a “7” on the pullring,

mounted on a wooden base with a sign that read,

“Complaints Department: Take a Number”...

Needless to say, they always did good work for me

and I never had any complaints...

I know of a church that had

a Suggestion Box beautifully made out of wood with a hinged lid

and on the same table was

a shoe box with a hole in the cover for Prayer Requests.

I know of a pastor who put such a suggestion box out for the congregation

and only got complaints either about the hymns

or about the temperature of the sanctuary.

The next Sunday- the suggestion box - was gone.

Quite frankly, ‘complaints’ and ‘suggestions’

really don’t deserve the place they often have in a church.

At least, not as much as ‘prayer requests’ ought to have.

Willard, p.2

Jesus said,

‘Ask and you will receive, seek and you will find,  
knock and the door will open up for you’...

Do you believe that?

Seems like an invitation to make ‘suggestions’ or ‘complaints’,  
but it is really about trust, patience, and grace.

It is about a relationship with that Great Mystery we call God –  
who through Christ, knows what it is like personally  
to be hungry and thirsty, alone and rejected.

God knows what it is to be human.

And God answers prayer – even the ‘prayers’ we don’t put words to,  
for God can read us.

God knows us not just by every strand of our hair,  
but by the strand of our DNA.

God not only comprehends all our languages  
but God can read our thoughts and our physical processes as well  
just like doctors interpret a diagnostic test.

God created us and therefore, God knows all our potentialities –  
God can read us.

Jesus said in words to this effect,

“Don’t babble on and on like hypocrites do  
who think their elaborate requests will be heard.  
For your Heavenly Guardian knows what you need  
even before you ask.”

And God answers prayer – God is still speaking,  
but sometimes that’s in the form of corrective action.

Perhaps God has ‘complaints’ or even ‘suggestions’ for us –  
ask yourself if you haven’t ever gotten a nudge sometime  
to do the right thing?

Now, actually a little guilt is good for us –  
it’s the thorn in your side to keep you humble  
and remind you: “Don’t do that again.”

Shame is different, paralyzing a person to make them a slave to remorse,  
and when that becomes your ‘bread’, life becomes little more than existence.

But even worse is when someone has no shame at all,  
living an unexamined life of depraved indifference,  
that thinks getting caught is the only problem.

Willard, p.3

In our Gospel lesson,

the people who caught boats to take them back across the sea  
made out like they happened to bump into Jesus there.

Now whether the miracle of 'Feeding the 5,000'

was in the physical enlargement of those loaves

or the simple sharing of what people already had,  
their motivation to find Jesus was still "greed".

These people were quite willing to believe in miracles, even enthusiastic about it.

but what they really thought they had was an unending source of free food.

And that was why Jesus was very blunt with them.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a protestant minister and theologian

who had been teaching at Union Theological Seminary

when he caught one of the last boats back to Germany before WWII.

He started an underground seminary for the Confessor movement

when the Lutheran Church was co-opted by the Nazis.

He was also implicated in a plot to assassinate Hitler

for which he was imprisoned and eventually hanged.

He is especially revered for his books, including Letters From Prison.

In The Cost of Discipleship ' – which he wrote before the war,

he warned about the dangers of 'cheap grace.

Bonhoeffer distinguished "cheap" grace from "costly" grace, saying:

*"...cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness*

*without requiring repentance,*

*baptism without church discipline.*

*Communion without confession.*

*Cheap grace is grace without discipleship,*

*grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ."*

He defined "costly grace on the other hand in this way:

*"...costly grace confronts us as a gracious call to follow Jesus,*

*it comes as a word of forgiveness*

*to the broken spirit and the contrite heart.*

*It is costly because it compels [someone]*

*to submit to the yoke of Christ and follow him;*

*it is grace because Jesus says:*

*'My yoke is easy and my burden is light.'*"

Willard, p.4

God has heard our hunger and responds with the 'bread' we need –  
oh, that's *need*, n-e-e-d, but sometimes it's *knead*, k-n-e-a-d.

Sometimes it is up to us to help in preparing the bread.

An example of the bread we need is 'freedom'

and there are a lot of people everywhere that need freedom –

not freedom to do what you please at the expense of everybody else,  
but the freedom to be who you are, without the fear of being rejected.

Relationship, community, integrated dialogue between God and you,  
between you and everybody else, between God and everybody else.

All the major religions have arisen out of this imperative,  
each with a slightly different message,

but all seeking to reconnect people with ultimate reality.

Christianity specifically addresses guilt and shame, repentance and forgiveness.

Do you remember the story when Jesus met a Samaritan woman  
drawing water from her village's well at midday?

He confronted her with the shame that kept her from going earlier  
that kept her avoiding the other women's gossip.

Through truth seasoned with humor – and no harangue to change her ways,  
she was transformed then to go and tell her whole village  
that she had met the Messiah and to come meet him.

The disciples themselves had just come from that same village  
with bread and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, eat."

But he said to them,

"I have food to eat of which you do not know."

And those literal-minded disciples asked each other,

"Did somebody bring him food?"

And Jesus just said to them, in words to this effect,

"My bread is to do the will of the one who sent me,  
and to accomplish God's work."

We are to follow Christ Jesus' example – to be disciples of Christ,  
not just as Christians in name only,

but to trust God amidst grinding circumstances,

to be patient for God's leading in the fires of waiting,

and grace to share and enjoy the bread of loving-kindness  
we help to make for each other.

Amen

Ex. 16:2-4, 9-15

<sup>2</sup> There in the desert they started complaining to Moses and Aaron,

<sup>3</sup> “We wish the LORD had killed us in Egypt.

When we lived there, we could at least sit down  
and eat all the bread and meat we wanted.

But you have brought us out here into this desert,  
where we are going to starve.”

<sup>4</sup> The LORD said to Moses,

“I will send bread down from heaven like rain.

Each day the people can go out and  
gather only enough for that day.

That’s how I will see if they obey me.”

<sup>9</sup> Moses turned to Aaron and said,

“Bring the people together, because the LORD has heard their complaints.”

<sup>10</sup> Aaron was speaking to them,

when everyone looked out toward the desert and  
saw the bright glory of the LORD in a cloud.

<sup>11</sup> The LORD said to Moses,

<sup>12</sup> “I have heard my people complain.

Now tell them that each evening they will have meat and  
each morning they will have more than enough bread.

Then they will know that I am the LORD their God.”

<sup>13</sup> That evening a lot of quails came and landed everywhere in the camp,  
and the next morning dew covered the ground.

<sup>14</sup> After the dew had gone,

the desert was covered with thin flakes that looked like frost.

<sup>15</sup> The people had never seen anything like this, and they started asking each other,

“What is it?”<sup>[a]</sup>

Moses answered,

“This is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat.

Inspired by John 6:22-35

THE NEXT DAY, THE CROWD THAT STAYED ON THE OTHER SIDE  
SAW THAT THERE WAS NO OTHER BOAT.

THEY HAD SEEN THAT JESUS DID NOT GO WITH HIS DISCIPLES,  
BUT THAT THEY HAD GONE ON ALONE.

NOW BOATS FROM TIBERIUS CAME NEAR THIS PLACE –

‘THE PLACE WHERE THEY ATE BREAD  
FOR WHICH THE LORD HAD GIVEN THANKS’.

AND SINCE THE CROWD SAW THAT JESUS WAS NOT THERE,  
NOR HAD HE GONE WITH HIS DISCIPLES,

THEY GOT INTO THESE BOATS  
AND WENT TO CAPERNAUM TO SEARCH FOR HIM!

AND THEY ‘HAPPENED’ TO FIND HIM  
ON THE OPPOSITE SHORE AND THEY SAID,  
“RABBI, WHEN DID YOU GET HERE?”

AND JESUS ANSWERED THEM,

“I AM TELLING YOU THE TRUTH, YOU SEARCHED FOR ME,  
NOT BECAUSE YOU SAW SOMETHING SIGNIFICANT,  
BUT BECAUSE YOU ATE BREAD AND FILLED YOUR BELLIES.  
DO NOT WORK FOR BREAD THAT PASSES AWAY,  
BUT WORK FOR THE BREAD THAT CONTINUES INTO ETERNAL LIFE,  
WHICH THE SON OF MAN, THE TRUE HEIR OF HUMANITY  
WILL GIVE YOU.

FOR ON THAT ONE HAS THE LOGO OF GOD BEEN STAMPED.”

SO THEY SAID TO HIM,

“WELL, WHAT SORT OF WORK IS IT TO DO THE WORK OF GOD?”

AND JESUS ANSWERED THEM,

THIS IS ‘THE WORK OF GOD’: THAT YOU TRUST THE ONE WHO IS SENT.”

AND THEY SAID TO HIM,

“SO WHAT SPECIAL THING DO YOU DO THAT WE MIGHT TRUST YOU?”

“WHAT IS YOUR WORK?”

“OUR ANCESTORS ATE MANNA IN THE DESERT;

BECAUSE OF THIS IT IS WRITTEN:

‘BREAD FROM HEAVEN WAS GIVEN TO THEM TO EAT.’”

THEN, JESUS SAID TO THEM,

“I AM REALLY TELLING YOU THE TRUTH,  
MOSES DID NOT GIVE YOU THE ‘BREAD FROM HEAVEN’;

RATHER THE ‘BREAD FROM HEAVEN’

CAME FROM MY FATHER, THE BELOVED GUARDIAN.

FOR THE BREAD OF GOD IS THAT WHICH COMES DOWN FROM HEAVEN  
TO GIVE LIFE TO THE WORLD.”

THEN, THEY SAID TO HIM,

“LORD, GIVE US THIS BREAD ALL THE TIME!”

JESUS SAID TO THEM,

“I AM THE ONE WHO IS THE BREAD OF LIFE.  
THOSE WHO COME TO ME WILL NOT STAY HUNGRY;  
AND THOSE WHO TRUST IN ME WILL NOT BE THIRSTY FOREVER.

John 6:24-35

[24] So when the people saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Caper'na-um, seeking Jesus.

[25] When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?"

[26] Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.

[27] Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of man will give to you; for on him has God the Father set his seal."

[28] Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?"

[29] Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."

[30] So they said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see, and believe you? What work do you perform?"

[31] Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, `He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

[32] Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven.

[33] For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven, and gives life to the world."

[34] They said to him, "Lord, give us this bread always."

[35] Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst.