

“Daily Bread”

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Exodus 16:2-15

Matthew 20:1-16

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.”

Exodus 20:11-12

Let us pray... O God,

Give us each day, the bread we need to eat, to pay our bills, to get help when we're sick,
but also when we just need to fill our hearts and nourish our souls.

Amen

The Exodus of the Hebrew people had a dramatic beginning

with the Ten Plagues forcing the hand of Pharaoh to let them go and then,
for them to escape from Egypt across the Red Sea into – the desert!

Now what? Talk about out of the frying pan and into the fire,
how are they all going to eat?

The people complain to Moses – and it seems like a reasonable concern.

Moses takes it up the chain of command, and

God responds with flocks of quail every evening and
something that would form on the ground like dew every morning
called “manna” that was prepared like bread.

There is some speculation about what manna actually was,

but the important point is that God sustained the community of faith
in the desert with “daily bread”...

Bread plays a very important part in our religion –

and it is the basic food or staple of most Western cultures.

The name of that local bakery/coffee-shop, called “Panera”,

implies that there is a broad cultural connection through bread.

The word for “bread” in Italian is “pane”; in Latin it is “panis”;

in French, it is “pain”; and Spanish is “pan”;

I imagine our English word for “pancake” is related.

Think of all the different kinds of bread there are...

Besides “Wonderbread”, there is whole wheat, rye, focaccia, multigrain,
matso, gluten-free...

There are different kinds of bread just like there are different cultures
of different kinds of people.

Willard, p.2

Communion immediately comes to mind where bread is transformed or symbolized as Christ's body.

Holy Communion itself is derived from the Passover Seder meal where participants eat matzo bread as part of remembering the Exodus.

The Hebrews had to be prepared to leave Egypt quickly, so they ate flatbread without yeast, because they could not wait for the dough to rise.

After the Hebrews had eluded the Egyptians

by venturing into the desert, they realized they needed food.

So, did they ask each other to open their stored goods to share what they had or organize search parties to hunt?

No-oo-o... They complained.

Apparently, that did the trick, because God listened

and provided the Hebrew refugees with manna – for their 'daily bread'.

What is a staple for you? What do you like to eat? What should you eat?

Do you eat to live or live to eat?

Now, what do you feed your mind?

Jesus said we don't live by bread alone, but by every word that

God is still speaking – Words can be our bread.

Imagine spending a day not being able to talk or listen to someone else.

Sometimes people seek that, like a silent retreat which can be refreshing.

For example, there was a novice who wanted to join

a particularly strict religious order that emphasized

the spiritual discipline of silence.

The abbot at the monastery explained to the young candidate

that he was to report back after a full day,

when he would be allowed to say only two words.

So, at sunset the next day, the novice came to the abbot and said,

"Cold food!"

Then, the abbot instructed him he was not to speak for a week,

when he would return to the abbot, but to say only two words.

So, after a week, the novice came back and said,

"No bl-bl-bl-blanket!"

Then, the abbot instructed him not to speak for a month,

when he would return to the abbot, but to say only two words.

So, after a month, the novice came back and said,

"I quit!"

And the abbot said,

"It's just as well. All you did was complain anyway!"

Willard, p.3

We feed our inner selves with images and ideas and words that nourish us –
or distress us.

Have you noticed when you have had a steady diet of bad news,
that can affect your outlook – and even how you treat others?

Our minds work something like

Googling on the Internet –

So, when we keep bringing up an idea,

it gets easier for the computer-part of the brain to track that interest
and bring up more and more news about it – good or bad...

You have to be careful about what you feed your heart and mind,
like what you eat to have a healthy body.

Don't let your daily bread be bitterness.

That is where the practice of Christian faith traditions can help.

For example, daily devotionals go back to the Middle Ages
in the form of a “Book of Days”.

Wealthy patrons often commissioned monastic libraries to make a book
of daily prayers for reflection, beautified with fanciful illuminations and
graceful calligraphy like the Book of Kells.

Reading devotionals together with meditation and prayer can be very beneficial
to help you figure out your priorities and maintain
a healthy balance for body, mind, and spirit –
helping to turn the Complaints Department into Prayer Requests

Jesus Calling by Sarah Young is a very good resource.

It is a series of daily essays written in the first person
as if Jesus was talking directly to you...

Now, you would never let another human being presume to talk to you in this way –
except Jesus whom we identify with God our Creator, almighty and merciful.

Here's a sample from today's reading:

*Wait quietly in My Presence while My thoughts form silently
in the depths of your being.*

*Do not try to rush this process,
because hurry keeps your heart earthbound.*

*I am the Creator of the entire universe,
yet I choose to make my humble home in your heart...*

The UCC features “Stillspeaking” devotionals online which include the writings of
Lillian Daniel, Donna Schaper, Kenneth Samuel, Martin Copenhaver,
and others who write from a variety of perspectives
that range from the “traditional” to the “edgy”.

Willard, p.4

Martin Copenhaver will be the keynote speaker for our Conference Fall Meeting and here's a sample of his writing, beginning with a quote from Isaiah 43:1...

*"Thus says the Lord: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you,
I have called you by name, you are mine."*

*[And Martin Copenhaver writes,] Many people have called me Marty . . . once.
I always correct them: "My friends call me Martin."*

*I don't like being rude, but I dislike the name Marty even more.
But there is more to it.*

*Quite simply, Marty is not my name. I do not feel addressed by it.
It is someone else's name.*

*[He goes on to say,...] we long to be addressed, for words to find us where we live.
Each of us wants to be recognized as an individual.*

We yearn to be known and known by name.

*The use of one's name symbolizes such ties between people
and can actually help create [relationships].*

*So when scripture says that God calls each one by name,
it comes as a welcome assurance.*

It implies that God is not an impersonal force.

*If God knows me by name it means that God is a being and, what is more,
a being who seeks to be in relationship with me...*

[W]hen God calls me by name, God doesn't say, Rev. Copenhaver or Marty.

Rather, God calls me Martin because that's not just my name. It is who I am.

http://day1.org/6111-martin_copenhaver_addressed_by_name

Another devotional that was on the cutting edge of its day, is now a classic called,
Are You Running With Me, Jesus? by Malcolm Boyd.

His language gets a little rough –

but is quaint in comparison with popular language these days.

Malcolm Boyd writes...

It's morning, Jesus.

It's morning, and here's that light and sound all over again...

I've got to move fast...

get into the bathroom, wash up, grab a bite to eat, and run some more.

I just don't feel like it, Lord...

Where am I running? You know these things I can't understand.

It's not that I need to have you tell me.

What counts most is just that somebody knows, and it's you.

That helps a lot.

So I'll follow along, okay? But lead, Lord.

Now I've got to run. Are you running with me, Jesus?

Willard, p.5

Getting our heads – and hearts, together before starting the day
can be so important!

Especially, as we interact and communicate with each other.
We need that interaction; We need words to share our ideas
through discussions that remain dialogue and do not disintegrate into debate.

Today is Peace Day which is promoted by a group called On Earth Peace;

This event is co-sponsored by 14 other religious organizations –
including the UCC, asking us to pray and work for peace.

Today's insert includes a chart that compares the difference between
dialogue and debate, challenging all of us to

“build peace and build understanding

by moving toward dialogue and away from debate.”

<http://onearthpeace.org/sites/default/files//Peace%20Day%20Dialogue%20vs%20Debate%20Handout.pdf>

Debate involves opponents trying to prove each other wrong
and to win;

Dialogue works toward common understanding
and to find common ground.

Debate listens for flaws in the other person's arguments;

Dialogue listens to understand.

Debate defends assumptions as 'the truth';

Dialogue reveals assumptions need to be re-evaluated;

Debate provokes criticism;

Dialogue provokes insight.

Debate insists on its own solution and is determined to show it is right;

Dialogue seeks the best solution and is open to change.

Debate maintains differences and doesn't care about hurting others' feelings;

Dialogue seeks agreement and is careful not to offend others.

A belly full of debate can leave someone
bitter and full of anger.

Dialogue, on the other hand, finds the best solution

while meeting the mutual need to be known and to be taken seriously
as human beings, deserving of respect.

Our God is a God of community and creativity and knows what we need
to survive each day and provides us with the daily bread we need to eat,

but also to pay our bills, to get help when we're sick,

and words we need to fill our hearts and nourish our souls and find peace.

Amen

Christy Waltersdorff, pastor at York Center Church of the Brethren in Lombard, Illinois, shares this pastoral prayer for peace...

*Holy God,
when we can't think of any solution other than war,
make us smarter.
When we begin to see others as expendable,
remind us that they are also made in your divine image.
When we say we can't take care of everyone who needs help,
make us more generous.
When we are satisfied with the divisions
between races and genders and economic classes in our country,
make us dis-satisfied until all are treated equally.
When we see weapons as our only choice,
enlarge our imagination.
When we refuse to see the need in your world,
open our eyes.
When we listen only to those who agree with us,
open our ears.
When we find comfort in ignorance,
fill us with an insatiable desire to learn your Truth.
When we grow comfortable with the way things are,
agitate us until things are the way you want them to be.
When we think violence is inevitable and peace unrealistic,
surprise us.
Prince of Peace, Forgive us.
Amen.*

*Our lesson from Exodus 16:2-15 tells about
how God provided food for the Hebrew people after they had escaped
the Egyptians to find refuge in the desert.*

- ² There in the desert they started complaining to Moses and Aaron,
³ “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.”
- ⁴ 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.
⁵ But on the sixth day of each week they must gather and cook twice as much.”
- ⁶ Moses and Aaron told the people,
“This evening you will know that
the LORD was the one who rescued you from Egypt.
⁷ And in the morning you will see his glorious power,
because he has heard your complaints against him.
Why should you grumble to us? Who are we?”
- ⁸ Then Moses continued,
“You will know it is the LORD when he gives you meat each evening
and more than enough bread each morning.
He is really the one you are complaining about, not us—we are nobodies—
but the LORD has heard your complaints.”
- ⁹ Moses turned to Aaron and said,
“Bring the people together, because the LORD has heard their complaints.”
- ¹⁰ Aaron was speaking to them, when everyone looked out toward the desert
and saw the bright glory of the LORD in a cloud.
- ¹¹ The LORD said to Moses,
¹² “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.”
- ¹³ That evening a lot of quails came and landed everywhere in the camp,
and the next morning dew covered the ground.
- ¹⁴ After the dew had gone,
the desert was covered with thin flakes that looked like frost.
- ¹⁵ The people had never seen anything like this, and they started asking each other,
“What is it?”
Moses answered,
“This is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat.”

Let us be guided and challenged by these words...

Matthew 20:1-16

20:1 As Jesus was telling what the kingdom of heaven would be like, he said:

Early one morning a man went out to hire some workers
for his vineyard.

2 After he had agreed to pay them the usual amount for a day's work,
he sent them off to his vineyard.

3 About nine that morning,
the man saw some other people standing in the market with nothing to do.

4 He said he would pay them what was fair,
if they would work in his vineyard.

5 So they went.

At noon and again about three in the afternoon he returned to the market.

And each time he made the same agreement with others
who were loafing around with nothing to do.

6 Finally, about five in the afternoon the man went back and
found some others standing there. He asked them,

“Why have you been standing here all day long
doing nothing?”

7 “Because no one has hired us,”
they answered.

Then he told them to go work in his vineyard.

8 That evening the owner of the vineyard told the man in charge of the workers
to call them in and give them their money.

He also told the man to begin with the ones who were hired last.

9 When the workers arrived,
the ones who had been hired at five in the afternoon
were given a full day's pay.

10 The workers who had been hired first
thought they would be given more than the others.

But when they were given the same,

11 they began complaining to the owner of the vineyard. **12** They said,
“The ones who were hired last worked for only one hour.

But you paid them the same that you did us.

And we worked in the hot sun all day long!”

13 The owner answered one of them,
“Friend, I didn't cheat you. I paid you exactly what we agreed on.

14 Take your money now and go!

What business is it of yours if I want to pay them the same
that I paid you?

15 Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money?

Why should you be jealous, if I want to be generous?”

16 Jesus then said,

“So it is. Everyone who is now first will be last,
and everyone who is last will be first.”