

Plymouth Presbyterian Church
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Presbyter for Vision and Mission
“The Daily Show”
John 6: 24-35

My first thought when I read this passage in preparation for my sermon was, “Something seems off here. Something does not seem quite right.” What struck me is that Jesus seems to be lightly shaming this group of people for seeking him. He tells them, **“Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life.”**

That seems like a reasonable spiritual admonition until we realize that the Lord’s Prayer that we recite every week has us repeating the words, **“Give us this day our daily bread.”** On one hand, we are taught that when we pray we ought to seek God out for our daily bread. On the other hand, we have Jesus calling these people to task for doing exactly that.

I found myself over the past couple of weeks just musing over the word “daily” in this phrase “daily bread.” Somewhere the key to this text seemed like it was hiding in this word from the Lord’s Prayer. And then I thought about the people for whom the word daily really resonates. One cannot walk through Portland right now without recognizing that there are hundreds of people who wonder where their next meal is going to come from. During the early part of the pandemic food pantries could not keep enough food on the shelves for those who were in danger of going hungry. There are people in this world for whom when they pray, “Give us this day our daily bread,” actually mean it just that way.

And this is when I realized that the key to this text is in the word “daily.” Jesus is not speaking to a group of homeless people, or to a line of people outside of a food pantry, or to a country ravaged by drought and famine. We have to look a few verses before this to remember that Jesus is speaking to a crowd of people who came to hear him teach, but who sat long enough on the hillside that they finally got hungry. This is where we get the story of the feeding of the 5,000. Jesus is talking to a group of people who went from sitting in a large crowd to hear him speak to following him on the road to get more bread. It would be like going to a lecture where snacks were provided and then following the speaker out the door to see if you could get more food.

Quite honestly, he was talking to people like us. He was talking to people for whom when they pray “Give us this day our daily bread,” don’t really know what it is like to have to depend on God for food every day.

How many of you know Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs? The American psychologist, Abraham Maslow, had constructed a tool that posited that psychological health was based on having our innate human needs met in priority. In other words, his belief is that one must have food, shelter and warmth before one can begin seeking safety and security. And one must have safety and security before one can pursue love and belonging. And it’s in having love and belonging that frees oneself up to address issues of self-esteem. And finally only when one is secure enough in one’s own skin can one achieve self-actualization and the sense that one’s life has ultimate purpose.

I believe what we have going on in this text where Jesus lightly shames the people is that he is talking to a group of people who are probably between

stages three and four on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, but who continue to worry about stage one and two—food, shelter, safety and security. He is not telling the homeless person “Get your mind off of food and think of things higher.” No, he is telling those who already have food, “Look, your security is not found in chasing after more food. God will provide. God is providing. Your security needs to be found in joining forces with the “bread of life.”

This is really a scripture passage and a sermon for those of us whose daily existence is not dependent on finding another scrap of food to survive the day or hoping someone has a handout on a street corner. This text is for those of us who buy insurance to cover every possible thing that could go wrong. It is for those of us who spend our lives trying to control the future so that we would never be wanting for anything. It is a reminder for those of us for whom God has already provided abundantly that life is more than food, more than shelter, even more than the people who make us feel loved.

Maslow would say that there is a point in one's life where one should be freed up to work on our psychological identity and eventually find one's purpose in serving humanity. Jesus would say there is a point where one can quit chasing after literal bread and can commit to the “bread of life.”

I do want to share that I remember when I got that lesson a few years ago. Some of you may know that in 2011 I rode my bicycle 4,000 miles through the Western United States after experiencing a spate of losses. My goal was to reconnect with all the places and people who had shaped me. At the time I felt fairly confident in my physical ability to do this. I have cycled my whole adult life

and, even though I knew it would be a challenge, I felt confident that my body would respond.

What I wasn't so confident about was having a place to sleep every night. The thing about cycling these kinds of distances is that you can't predict how far you are going to get each day. Some days you plan for 80 miles only to discover that you wake up sluggish and out of sorts. Another day thunderstorms slow you down by 20 or 30 miles. And still other days, you feel so good and there is a tailwind that you sail right through one town and head on to the next one covering many more miles than you expected. So it is nearly impossible to book lodging more than a few hours ahead.

During the first two days of my trip I had booked a place to stay with some fellow cyclists in Silverton and then a campsite for my second night in Detroit Lake. After that, I had to hope and trust and keep my fingers crossed. It made me nervous. My thoughts were consumed with where I was going to sleep each night.

And this is what happened. I didn't know for sure on a daily basis where my food, my water and my lodging was going to come from. But what I discovered is that God had a way of providing each day even one to two hours before I needed to find lodging for the night. Just as an example, while crossing the rest of Oregon, I stayed in a hotel in Sisters after getting soaked in a rainstorm, then I camped at Ochoco State Park east of Prineville, then a church set me up in Dayville near John Day, then a couple at a restaurant joined for me dinner and invited me to stay at their place at the Austin Store Junction, then I found a cheap motel in Unity, and finally relatives of church members took me in in Ontario on one hour's notice.

The point is every single day I found myself praying, “Give me this day my daily bread, give me this day my daily shelter,” and God provided. And the amazing thing that happened is that once I learned to trust that God would provide my basic necessities the more it opened me up to reflect on my life, my purpose, and who God meant me to be. It wasn’t having lodging scheduled ahead of time for all 4,000 miles of the trip; it was learning to trust that God would provide on a daily basis that opened me up to do what Maslow would describe as our higher psychological tasks. And what I think Jesus would describe as getting our focus off of actual bread so that we can commit to the “living bread.”

I think this message is really important in this particular time in which we live. Because I think that crowd of people who Jesus is talking to is us. We are the people who aren’t satisfied with just knowing where our next meal is going to come from. We want to have a plan in place to make sure we have food all year. We buy insurance to make sure that if something goes wrong our security will not be affected. We spend a lifetime crafting a retirement plan so that as we age we are pretty darn sure we know how our food, our lodging and our medical needs are going to be covered. If we can help it, we leave as little up to God as we can.

I don’t think Jesus is saying that there is something wrong with planning ahead. What he is saying is that there comes a point where we’ve got it covered and it doesn’t make sense to keep putting energy into the illusion of security; it’s time to put our energy into higher things—working for the bread of life, committing to healing the world, finding our deeper purpose.

There is a scene in the Oscar-winning movie from 2020, *Nomadland*, that I believe gets to the heart of today’s scripture lesson. Fern, played by Frances

McDormand, has lost her job and her husband and finds herself living on the road in a van. Eventually she meets a wonderful man—a good-looking, sensitive, and wise nomad himself. He gets invited to live with his son and his family on an small estate near the Pacific Ocean with goats and chickens and more beauty than any one person should hope for. He really likes Fern and he invites her to join him giving up her nomadic lifestyle in favor of the security of food, shelter, safety, security and a loving family. After seeing how hard her nomadic lifestyle was I think many who watched that movie were thinking this would be the happy ending.

In this pivotal scene, she ponders the comforts of what she is being offered and then looks back to her van. She closes the door behind her and drives away. In the next scene, she is standing on a bluff overlooking the wide expanse of the Pacific Ocean. She has made her choice. Despite the comforts of a home she still chooses the freedom of the open road. She still prefers to trust Life and trust God one day at a time.

“Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name,
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread...”

What it would it be like if we literally had to trust God one day a time?

Take a moment and repeat over three times, "Give us this day our daily bread..." focusing on the word daily. Then, when you are ready replace "bread" with the things you really do depend on God for on a daily basis.