



The Anglican Parish of Whangaparaoa Peninsula
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Sermon

Give us this day our daily bread

Exodus: 16: 2-15; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Luke (11:1-4), 12:22-34

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We all need food, don't we, in order to survive. But when have any of us, been desperate for food? Or wondered where the next meal was coming from, however meagre?

Louis Zamperini an American bomber pilot had been taken prisoner by the Japanese and along with other POW's had been sent to a prison camp at Omori, Tokyo in October 1944 . The conditions were horrendous, and, as Christmas approached, Louie's strength and determination faltered.

Laura Hillenbrand, in her mesmerising book entitled "Unbroken", writes that 'starvation was consuming' Louie:

What was most maddening was that ample food was so near. Twice, that Fall, Red Cross relief packages had been delivered for the POW's, but instead of distributing them, camp officials had hauled them into storage, and begun taking what they wanted from them. They made no effort to hide the stealing. ..The Bird, (the camp Commandant), was the worst offender....Toward the end of December, the Bird ordered all of the men to the compound, where they found a truck brimming with apples and oranges. In all of his time as a POW, Louie had seen only one piece of fruit, that tangerine that Sasaki had given him. The men were told that they could take two pieces each. As the famished men swarmed onto the pile, Japanese photographers circled, snapping photos. Then, just as the men were ready to devour the fruit, the order came to put it all back. The entire thing had been staged for propaganda.

Such was the cruelty of war, and sadly many in war torn situations today, in places like Mosul and Aleppo in Syria, are caught up in struggles where hunger for the victims, or near starvation, is a harsh reality. How important then to be given 'your daily bread'.

Which might raise the question for us, when we do have plenty to eat, or even merely just sufficient, as to whether we show gratitude, and express thanks to God, and/or to others, for what we have received? Or do we grumble if what has been provided is not cooked the way we like it, or if our portion was a bit meagre? Or do we just see our meals as our entitlement and take them for granted, until we too find ourselves in a place of hardship?

Certainly the people of Israel seemed to have a propensity for complaining, and were quick to find things to grumble about on their travels in the wilderness. These were the same people, who had so very recently witnessed the amazing power of God, when on the night of the Passover, the angel of death passed over their homes (the doorposts of which had been marked with the blood of a lamb), but caused the death of the Egyptian firstborn, both children and animals, in every Egyptian household, including that of Pharaoh himself. This then lead to his finally allowing all of them, under Moses' leadership, to leave Egypt, along with their flocks and herds, along with articles of silver and gold, which they were given, having successfully plundered the Egyptians. Then they had been so dramatically rescued from Pharaoh and all his charioteers, who had decided to pursue the Israelites. God caused the waters of the Red Sea to part, allowing the

Israelites to pass through in safety, but caused the waters to flood back and bring about the demise of Pharaoh and all his troops.¹

When they had lacked water to drink in the Desert of Shur and had only found bitter water in Marah, they had grumbled against Moses, saying 'What are we to drink?' Moses in turn had cried out to the Lord in prayer, who showed him a piece of wood, which when thrown into the water, caused it to become sweet. Yet again God had provided for them.²

In today's reading from Exodus 16 we have heard how on leaving Elim, and coming to the desert of Sin, between Elim and Sinai, the people had grumbled against Moses and Aaron and had expressed the wish they had died in Egypt. At least there they would have had plenty of meat and other food to eat. They feared that instead they would die of starvation in the desert. The Lord spoke to Moses, promising to rain down *bread from heaven*, sufficient for each day, for each person, with a double portion for the people to gather up on the sixth day. (In this way they would be able to have a day of rest, if they were obedient. Moses warned them, however, that the Lord had *heard their grumbling against him*; Moses said '*Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the Lord.*'

He told them that in the evening *they would know that it was the Lord who had brought them out of Egypt*, and that in the morning *they would see the glory of God*. Not only that, but they would be given meat to eat in the evening and all the bread they wanted in the morning. "That evening, quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. The people had never seen anything like this before and on asking Moses what it was, were told: 'It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat.' They were to gather sufficient for the needs of each person in their tent. Was the Lord faithful? Yes. Was he their provision? Yes. Were they obedient? Many were, but some went out on the seventh day to gather the manna and found there was none. Some who had been instructed not to keep the manna overnight, found that in the morning it was full of maggots and had begun to smell.

How amazing is the Lord's provision for his people, if they will only learn to fully trust in him and obey his commands, and follow his instructions.

As we have been hearing over the past two weeks from Ian and Peter in their preaching, Jesus, in both Matthew and Luke's Gospel account, is responding to a request from his disciples that he teach them to pray. Jesus himself had just been in prayer, and they would have recognised this dynamic of prayer as an integral part of his daily life and central to his relationship with his Father in heaven; hence the nature of their request 'Lord, teach us to pray as John (the Baptist) taught his disciples'.

His instruction to them and through them to all of his future followers, is to pray, '*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done*' (found in Matt 6:9-10) or more simply, as we have heard in Luke's account: '*Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come*. The disciples, have been encouraged to come to God in prayer, recognising that God is the Father of all believers, and that they therefore are part of a potentially growing family who are to continue to revere God's name and to do his will.

Next, in both Gospel versions of the Lord's Prayer, come three prayers of petition. Today we are looking at the first of these petitions. Jesus tells his disciples to pray, 'Give us each day our daily bread' in Luke 11:3 (N.B. 'Give us today our daily bread' in Matthew 6:11). Knowing full well that they may not pray each day, (for Jesus says elsewhere in his instructions on prayer in Matthew's Gospel: 'And *when* you pray') Jesus tells them to request their daily bread for each day. In other words they are to look to God for continuous provision, but not to ask for large amounts to be supplied for a lengthy period, for then the danger would be that they would forget God's goodness and stop looking to him. Look what happened with the Israelites in the desert of Shur? God's desire is for a close and loving relationship with each of his followers who are invited to ask for whatever they need and to come again and again to God, trusting in his faithful love for them and his willingness to provide their daily needs. Having looked at a number of bible commentaries' it would seem that the precise meaning of the Greek word '*epiousios*'- 'daily' is not clear. It is a very rarely used word in the biblical text. This 'daily' bread it is suggested could be 'the food we need' or the 'bread of our existence.'

Jesus then goes on in Luke 12 to tell the disciples not to worry about anything, not their food, nor their drink, nor their clothing, nor even about their lives, because God, who provides food for the ravens and clothes the lilies of the field in such beautiful raiment, sees these disciples as infinitely more valuable than the birds and knows what their needs are. Jesus says, it has been his Father's pleasure to give them the kingdom. As a good and loving Father who cares for them, he will assuredly provide for them all these things, *if they will seek his kingdom*' How are they to do that? By selling their

¹ Exodus 12-14

² Exodus 15:21-25

possessions and giving to the poor, thus not only demonstrating their gratitude to God for his goodness to them & showing the Father's love to those who are in need.

Perhaps you recall the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman? On that occasion, as she returns to her town to tell her people that she may have seen the one who is the Christ, and after a hot and tiring day, Jesus' disciples urge him to eat, but he responds 'I have food to eat that you know nothing about'. And when they wonder if someone could have brought him food, he goes on to say, 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.' On another occasion Jesus had quoted these words from Deut 8:3, in response to one of Satan's attempts to get him to sin against God, 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.' In other words the supply of one's material needs is not enough. God's word was to be a 'lamp for their feet and a light for their path' just as it had been for David, shepherd and later king of Israel, and is to be for us for us as believers.

Jesus would call his followers to 'abide in him' and remind them that without him they could do *nothing* of lasting value. And in John 6, after the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus would declare to the crowds that came after him and to his disciples, 'I am the bread of life' (vv.35 & 48) and 'I am the living bread that came down out of heaven', and 'This bread is my flesh which I will give for the life of the world. (John 6:51) These words would shock people and cause some of his disciples to turn away. He would share the Last Supper with them, at the time of the Passover, commanding them to 'do this in remembrance of him' before being taken prisoner and going to his death. Paul, as we have heard today in the reading from 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, was continuing this practise in obedience to Jesus' own command.

Today as we come together to share in the Eucharist, we are reminded that his body was indeed broken and his blood poured out on Calvary, in fulfilment of his Father's will and completion of his work... Jesus had been able to say in almost his last words from the cross, before he died, 'It is finished'.

What might we learn then from all of this?

This week and in the future, will we recognise the importance of not grumbling, but being thankful for what we have, by way of food and everything else?

Will we recognise God as the source of all we have and of our very existence, as the one who wills to provide our daily needs, as we seek first his kingdom, and choose to be thankful to both him and others?

Will we show kindness to those in need, sharing what we have with them out of both compassion and gratitude to God for such opportunities to demonstrate his kingdom values?

A final thought - As you come to receive communion in remembrance of Jesus today, you may wish to picture in your mind someone whom you know to be in need, and as it were, bring them with you to the altar rail to meet with Jesus. What needs might they express to Jesus, if they came seeking his help? And what might you do this week to help them?

N.B. And what of Louis Zamperini? In spite of incredible odds, he did survive the war, his spirit unbroken, and returned to the United States and to his much loved family. He would eventually be reminded of a promise he had once made to God, that if God ever helped him to get back home again, he would spend the rest of his days helping others and following Christ, and Louie would indeed go on to do just that!