

PRAYER OF PROVISION
Series: "Christ in the School of Prayer"
March 13, 2016 –Mark 6: 30-44
The Church of the Covenant

The story of the Feeding of the 5,000 that we just read from the Gospel of Mark really begins a thousand years before in the wilderness and with Moses and with the feeding of the people of God in the desert. Each day as Moses led the people of God through the wilderness and toward the Promised Land manna, a flaky bread-like substance would float down out of the sky at night and the people would gather it and eat it for that day. Manna literally means "what is it?" and so it is called by what the people first blurted out when they first saw the manna from heaven. They could not store it for it would rot in a day. They had to rely on it falling from heaven every day. It was God's provision for the people of God. The people had need; God provided; God's purpose was to lead the people out of the wilderness and into a Promised Land and God provided in a consistent way for the people's provision. What is it? It is manna from heaven providing for the people of God.

And then the story proceeds by having Jesus teach the disciples to pray. "*Teach us to pray*" they ask the Master. We see how YOU pray, Jesus, and we see how the Lord answers YOUR prayers, Jesus, so teach us to pray like that, Lord. And Jesus gives the disciples the prayer we pray every Sunday, The Lord's Prayer. "Pray like this", says Jesus. One of the phrases in that prayer is the phrase, "*Give us this day our daily bread*". And this phrase in the Lord's Prayer clearly is a reference to the Old Testament manna coming from heaven. It is DAILY BREAD. It comes on a daily basis. It is provision for the day. You cannot store this provision; you cannot invest this provision; you can only believe and hope and expect that it comes, and this only because you know that God always provides for His people. Like in the wilderness God provides manna from heaven. The provision comes from heaven and from God. What is it? It is manna from heaven providing for the people of God.

And then the story proceeds by having Jesus take the disciples to a "lonely place" to pray. Jesus says to them: "*Come away by yourselves to a lonely place, and rest a while.*" (Mark 6: 31) The miracle of The Feeding of the 5,000 begins in the desert a thousand years before, it proceeds through Jesus teaching His disciples how to pray to God "Give us this day our daily bread", and then it continues as Jesus takes the disciples away to a place set apart and they pray and pray and pray, seeking to know and discern God's will for what is about to happen. Jesus knows that something is up; Jesus knows the Spirit is at work; Jesus can see the signs of God's provision all around Him. So Jesus goes off to a lonely place to pray, to park His heart in the presence of the heart of God, to take copious amounts of time to be in God's presence, to seek to discern God's will for what is about to happen. Please note, my beloved, that the miracle of The Feeding of the 5,000 would not have happened but for everything that had happened beforehand. Knowledge that God provides. Manna from heaven. Prayer with the disciples. Prayer on a lonely hillside set apart. Much prayer and more prayer and prayer and prayer and prayer. And then the favor and the blessing comes. Then the manna from heaven descends. Then the Lord provides. "*We do not have because we do not ask*" Says the Word of God. We lack the provision we need because we do not pray. Much prayer; much provision. Much prayer; much favor. Much prayer; many blessings. No prayer; no provision, no favor no blessing –right??????

So by now in this story of The Feeding of the 5,000 Jesus knows that God is up to something. But He doesn't know exactly what it is quite yet. He goes to a place far away from people and suddenly a large throng of people surround Him and He begins to preach and teach. God provided the throng of people hanging on Jesus' words. Manna from heaven. God provided the WORD of God Jesus was preaching.

Manna from heaven. And God provided Jesus Christ Himself, He who is the Living Word and He who IS "the BREAD of LIFE." Manna from heaven. And the people show up in droves and droves. 5,000 men and how many women and children? 10,000 or more people coming to Jesus the Bread of Life, taking in every Word He speaks (Man shall not live by bread alone but from every Word the proceeds from the mouth of the Father). Jesus sees the mighty hand of God at work, a miracle of God's provision. Too many people. Too little time. He has "compassion on them" for they are like "sheep without a shepherd" (Mark 6: 34) And HE began to teach them many things. O, to sit at the foot of Jesus in prayer and to be taught many things. O, to have the Master have compassion on His children in prayer. O, to hang upon His every Word. O, to hear His voice speak into our heart. "My sheep hear my voice" saith the Good Shepherd. What is it? What is it? Manna from heaven. The bread of life. The provision of God. Jesus.

Then the disciples begin kvethching around, complaining, telling Jesus the 12,000 reasons why something cannot happen. Most of our praying and believing is precisely this. Disciples, all too human, always do. "Jesus, there are too many people here. Send them away." "Jesus, send them back to the towns where they can provide for themselves." "Jesus, this is a lonely place, there is no food here, it is impossible for us to provide for them, stop preaching and stop teaching and send them away." When the sheep are hearkening to the Good Shepherd's voice the Master will NEVER send them away empty. If God provided in the wilderness manna and provision, will not Jesus do the same in this wilderness? Does HE not have compassion on His own sheep? What is it? What is it? Manna from heaven.

Jesus now does something very spare and elegant. We do not hear Him offer a great and magnificent prayer, praying out loud for everyone to hear. He does not dramatically wave His hands and produce a miracle like a magician or TV Evangelist. No, Jesus knows that God is up to something. Jesus can sense the Spirit powerfully at work. Jesus sees the hand of God providing. He senses this; He knows God's ways. He knows the stories of God's provision in the wilderness; He understands manna; He gets and understands the moment. The moment is ripe for God to show His hand to His people through His SON. So Jesus largely remains silent. And HE simply looks to heaven. As it says, "And taking the five loaves and two fish HE looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves..." (Mark 6: 41) You know, just as you might do over supper tonight. He said grace. "Lord, give us this day our daily bread..." Simple. He looked to heaven, because that's where God's provision comes from. Manna always comes from heaven. So Jesus in trust looked to heaven to provide. He blessed the loaves. He was already prayed up; He had already prayed and prayed and prayed at the far away hill. He had sensed in prayer what God was about to do. He expected the provision. He knew God was up to something. He saw from the Bible how God provided in the wilderness for the people of God. And He expected God to provide. And God did. And He looked up. What is it? What is it? What is this thing that just happened? Manna from heaven. Why do we look every place BUT HEAVEN for our provision in life, for our daily bread, for our manna??????

I love the Norman Rockwell painting of the older woman, a grandmother, praying with her little grandchild, in a greasy-spoon restaurant, their heads bowed and their hands folded in prayer. There are younger guys with cigarettes dangling from their lips gawking at this scene. Simple. Heads bowed. Hands folded in prayer. Not much in front of them to speak of to eat. But they were looking to heaven for manna and God had provided. Not the lottery. Not the daily number. Not the business or the job. Not the government. Nope. God had provided their daily bread. In today's world it is a radical prophetic statement to pray; to have the world see you pray, to pray in public and to pray in private and to believe and to trust in the Lord to provide. Because our culture and our society believes that it provides for itself. Its work provides its daily bread. The economy provides. Or the government

provides. Nope. **Apart from me ye can do nothing**, says Jesus. Nope. GOD PROVIDES. And prayer is the tangible visible reality of the people of God attesting to the fact that ONLY GOD PROVIDES.

By the way WHO is the answer to every prayer? It is Jesus; HE who is the BREAD of LIFE; Give us this day our daily infusion of JESUS, the sustenance for our soul; the answer to every PRAYER OF PROVISION. HE is the Living BREAD who feeds us. We pray. God provides. What is it? What is it? Manna from heaven. The BREAD of LIFE. We pray. Jesus comes. HE is our manna from heaven. And we discover HIM, Christ in the School of Prayer. Amen and Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, Pennsylvania
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*