



Proper 13



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Up

August 3, 2003

Prayer of the Day

Gracious Father, your blessed Son came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world. Give us this bread, that he may live in us and we in him, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Exodus 16:2-4, 9-15

{2} The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. {3} The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." {4} Then the LORD said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not.... {9} Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, 'Draw near to the LORD, for he has heard your complaining.'" {10} And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. {11} The LORD spoke to Moses and said, {12} "I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.'" {13} In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. {14} When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. {15} When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat.

The story of manna and quails also appears in Numbers 11:4ff. While Numbers 11 is clearly J, in this passage verses 4-5 and 13b-15 are J while the rest is P.

2. *complained*: See also verses 7, 8, 9, 12. The theme of Israel's complaining that Moses and/or Aaron have brought them out of Egypt to die in the wilderness runs through the story of the Exodus (Exodus 15:24; Numbers 14:36, 16:11, 17:5, 20:2). The complaint is not just a reaction to difficult circumstances, it is tantamount to a repudiation of Yahweh's deliverance.

3. *we sat by the fleshpots*: "...the slave labour in Egypt would hardly as a rule have eaten boiled 'flesh' by the 'fleshpots'...." [1]

4. Yahweh tells Moses that he will "rain bread from heaven" as a test of the people's willingness to obey the instructions (which are omitted in this reading) for collecting the manna.

[5-8: Yahweh gives instructions about how to gather the manna. Moses and Aaron tell the Israelites that Yahweh will provide food for them. This is repeated in verses 9-12.]

10. *the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud*: Although "no one has ever seen God (John 1:18; 1 John 4:12)," in the wilderness Yahweh appeared in the cloud, a theophany.

12. *you shall eat meat*: The reference to meat is expanded in verse 13 (P) to be quails. The provision of quails is repeated in Numbers 11 (J).

13b-15. *a layer of dew...a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost...the bread that the Lord has give you*: Verses 16-36 further describe the "bread," how it was to be gathered, what it was like and what it was called.

Psalms 78:23-29

{23} Yet he commanded the skies above, and opened the doors of heaven; {24} he rained down on them manna to eat, and gave them the grain of heaven. {25} Mortals ate of the bread of angels; he sent them food in abundance. {26} He caused the east wind to blow in the heavens, and by his power he led out the south wind; {27} he rained flesh upon them like dust, winged birds like the sand of the

seas; {28} he let them fall within their camp, all around their dwellings. {29} And they ate and were well filled, for he gave them what they craved.

This is one of several Psalms which contain an extended recitation of the history of the people of Israel; it covers that history from the exodus to Yahweh's choice of David. The selected verses celebrate Yahweh's feeding of the Israelites in the wilderness with manna and quails. According to the story in Exodus 16, they ate manna in the wilderness for forty years (16:35: Yahweh is praised as the one who graciously mortals to eat from Yahweh's own table. I am reminded of the Syrophoenician woman who begged to be allowed to eat the crumbs that fell from Jesus' table (a metaphor for a healing of her daughter).

23. *doors of heaven*: Genesis 28:17: Jacob says that the place where he had a dream and saw a ladder set up between earth and heaven is "none other than the house of God, and this is the *gate of*

heaven." Yahweh opens the "doors" of heaven in order to "rain down" the manna. [2]

24. *the grain of heaven*: This is God's gift as distinguished from the grain of Egypt (Numbers 20:5).

25. *the bread of angels*: Literally, "the bread of the strong ones," i.e. the angels. In Psalm 105:40, another of the "historical" Psalms, it is called "bread of heaven."

food in abundance: As in Psalm 105:40 God gives food abundantly.

29. *what they craved*:). In Numbers 11 the "craving" which was satisfied by the quails led to a "plague," possibly over-indulgence or food poisoning, and many people died. They called the place Kibroth-hattaavah, "Graves of craving" (Numbers 11:34), for those who had died and were buried there.

Ephesians 4:1-16

{1} I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, {2} with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, {3} making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. {4} There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, {5} one Lord, one faith, one baptism, {6} one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. {7} But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. {8} Therefore it is said, "When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people." {9} (When it says, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? {10} He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) {11} The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, {12} to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, {13} until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. {14} We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. {15} But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, {16} from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

"...each subdivision of this passage deals with the church.... The first three verses (4:1-3) contain not only urgent advice that the saints be humble, united, strong in mutual love; but they also mention peace.... Vss. 4:4-6 combine distinctly Christian creedal elements.... A oneness which exerts a unifying force beyond the community of the saints.... In the next subsection, vss. 7-10, the distribution of various gifts by the exalted Christ is mentioned as proof that 'all things' are being filled by Christ. The special ministers...their charge is to train all the saints for their ministry...to prepare them for meeting the Lord...and to protect them from childish and deceitful behavior (vss. 12-14).... The present church cannot claim any glory for herself. 'Perfection' is a gift...it is not yet possessed (v. 13). In vss. 14-15, finally, the accent is sent upon the 'growth' of the church.... Continuous change and renewal...is the mark of the living body of Christ." [3]

1. *I therefore, the prisoner*: Cf. 3:1, "I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles."

in the Lord: "The words 'in the Lord' are used by Paul preferably in ethical contexts and suggest, therefore, the periphrastic version, 'in the Lord's service'." [4]

the calling to which you have been called: "The nature and effect of calling may be compared with the bestowal of a title or a patent of nobility. Those made God's own people and servants are equivalent knights of God. According to Paul they are bound to a specific code of honor and conduct." [5]

2. *bearing with one another in love:* See Galatians 5:14; Romans 13:8-10. Love is the fundamental meaning of the law. It is the essential consequence of God's love of his people. It is not an emotion, but rather action on behalf of a neighbor.

3. *unity of the Spirit:* Because each saint is called into Christ by the Spirit, all saints are united by that call of the Spirit.

4-6: This is a confessional statement in hymnic form. The number "one" is used author intends to show that historic and social unity on earth is totally dependent upon God's eternal oneness and unity.... By its very existence the church confesses God's essence to the universe.

8. *"When he ascended on high....* Psalm 68:18, with change for 2nd to 3rd person, and from receiving gifts or tribute to giving gifts.

9. *what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts:* "Certainly the 'model' of a descent followed by an ascent is also represented in the lives of the OT righteous ones, e.g. of Joseph, Moses, David, the Suffering Servant: through utter humiliation all of them attained highest glory." [6] "The descent of Christ mentioned in 4:9 denotes his incarnation and, most likely, his crucifixion." [7]

11. *apostles:* "Christ's delegates who went abroad as authorized preachers." [8]

"prophets" "Their specific charisma appears not only to have been making predictions of the immediate future...but above all in applying the gospel to specific contemporary circumstances." [9]

evangelist: "... 'evangelists' were missionaries who brought the gospel into new regions." [10]

pastors and teachers: "While sometimes in the NT 'teachers' and 'shepherds'...are mentioned separately, and at other occasions the times 'bishop' and 'elder' occur, all these functions probably belong together." [11]

10. *He who descended is the same one who ascended:* Jesus is the one who ascended to heaven. The Jesus who ascended is the same one who descended as Jesus to begin with. So, rejection, humiliation, even a shameful death, are components of God's purpose and express his glory.

14. *We must no longer be children:* In the New Testament "children" are those who need care and protection. Sometimes, as here, to be children is to be indecisive and easily beguiled by those who would deceive us. There is the sense of "unfinished-ness," "incompleteness" which is recognized by people, who then seek to be complete and finished by their own efforts. This was the situation in the garden of Eden, which the subtle serpent exploited, leading Eve first and then Adam to disobey God.

15-16. *we must grow up...into him who is the head, into Christ...from whom the whole body...each part:* We are parts of the body, Christ is the head. We become like Christ (grow into him) because we are "from" him, that is, we have been baptized into him and reflect him in our lives. See also 1 Corinthians 12. Since we are parts of the Body of Christ, we are all knit together, and built ourselves up in love.

"Eph 4:1-16 describes a humble and loving church who is responsive to her present task and eager to reach her goal. Such a church will not consider herself an empire-builder. She will not pretend that she possesses, masters and administers the Lord and his gifts. She will be meek before the Lord and modest before unbelievers. She has a promise to trust, a way in which to go, a commitment to fulfill, and an energy given to her, which are not her own. The church is as much as, but no more than, a happy migrating people moving forward to the day of redemption. She is a hard-working community of servants who accept their call into God's witness stand for the sake of the whole creation.

"Having her eyes directed upon the Lord and enduring the hardships found on her way, this church can, as much as Israel according to Ps 123, endure the 'contempt of the proud.'

But under no circumstances will she glorify herself at the expense of God. The work in which she is engaged is still unfinished. It is still to be proved anew that she really is God's people and does God's will. According to the constitution of the church her origin and purpose lie beyond herself. She is neither her own master nor her own end. That which is beyond the church establishes her existence. Beyond the church are God himself and all the men, the ages, the creatures whom the church is to serve." [12]

John 6:24-35

{24} So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for 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, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. {27} Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal." {28} Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform 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, "What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? {31} Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" {32} Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who 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, "Sir, give us this bread always." {35} Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

24. *the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there*: Jesus left to avoid the crowd's intention to make him a king (6:14-15), while the disciples had departed by boat for Capernaum (6:16-17). Three or four miles from shore Jesus came to them walking on the water (6:19-20).

they...got into the boats: Additional boats had been sent from Tiberius to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, where the multiplication of the loaves had taken place, to bring the crowds back to Capernaum (6:23).

25. *Rabbi*: Jesus has already been identified as "the Prophet" (6:14), and a potential king (6:15). Now "he is addressed with the modest title of 'Rabbi'." [13]

26. *you are looking for me...because you ate your fill of the loaves*: The crowd has focused on the material effects of the signs, as we do whenever we focus on the natural effect of God's gifts, health, prosperity, power or prestige, rather than the spiritual aspect.

27. *food that endures for eternal life*: This is the true nature of God's blessings.

28-29. *What must we do*: The crowd seeks to know how to be worthy of God's gifts.

This is the work of God: The work of God is that they believe.

30-31. *What sign*: Again the crowd challenges Jesus, asking what sign he will give them, so that they can be convinced to trust him. They mention the sign of the manna in the wilderness as the sign that confirmed the authority of Moses.

32-33: Jesus says that it was God, not Moses, who give the true bread from heaven. At this point he is anticipating verse 35, where he identifies himself as *the bread of life*.

34. *Sir, give us this bread always*: The crowd does not yet know how Jesus will identify himself with the true bread of life. Their request is like that of the Samaritan woman, John 4, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water." They are still concerned with the material side of God's blessings.

35. *I am the bread of life*: This is the first of seven times that Jesus speaks metaphorically of himself using a formula of recognition, "I am;" in Greek, *ego eimi*; in Hebrew, *ethyeh* (6:35, 51, bread of life; 8:12, (9:5), light of the world; 10:7, 9, gate; 10:11, 14, good shepherd; 11:25, resurrection, life; 14:6, way, truth, life; 15:1, 5, true vine). The recognition formula is an expression of the identity of Jesus with Yahweh, whose name is bound up with the very nature of "being."

Jesus identifies himself as the bread of life, the true bread from heaven, the manna which God gave the ancestors in the wilderness. In making this identification Jesus makes a definitive comment on the statement in Deuteronomy 8:3, that God feed them with manna

"in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD." God has sent his Word into the world in Jesus, so that the world might know God (see also John 17:3).

Reflection

Both the Israelites who came out of Egypt in the Exodus and were fed by Yahweh in the wilderness, and those who witnessed the multiplication of the loaves missed the essential point. It is not the material, physical, or natural aspects of God's actions that reveal who he is, but rather the supernatural, spiritual and eternal aspects that are ultimately important. The food that was given is only a sign that points beyond physical hunger and satisfaction to the gift of eternal life.

We pray that we may be given Christ, the true bread from heaven, so that he may give us life. We do not live as individual Christians, but as the "Body of Christ." Christ is our head, we are the members of his body. We are united in Christ. Individuals have been given gifts, not for their benefit, but to contribute to the ongoing growth of the church. In the church we are to be humble and love one another; we are to avoid self-glorification, childish waywardness, and stagnation.

Hymns [14]

With One Voice (e.g. 762v), *Hymnal Supplement* 1991 (e.g. 725s) and *LBW* (e.g. 32).

E=Entrance; D=Hymn of the Day; I=First Lesson, P=Psalm; II=Second Lesson; G=Gospel

222 --E--O Bread of	748v --II--Bind Us Together
209 --D--Come, Risen Lord	756v --II--Lord, You Give
511 --P--Renew Me, O	(748s)
732v --P--Create in Me	197 --G--O Living Bread
414 --II--O God of Love,	224 --G--Soul, Adorn Yourself
745v --II--Awake, O Sleeper	--G--709v/772s, 702v/762s,
(813s)	--G--700v/761s, 701v
755v --II--We All Are One	343, 408, 765s, 392

Prayers of the People [15]

Like a grieving parent, O God, you seek out all people. You have given us bread from heaven, even Jesus himself. You call us to put away the old ways and start fresh with the new, the ways you give. They are so clearly spoken of in Scripture but so hard to follow. Equip us by your Holy Spirit to know and confess our shortcomings and sins. We trust in you alone to raise us up and make us followers. God of David and our Ephesian sisters and brothers in Christ hear our prayer.

Bless those who gather this next week in Worship conference at Augustana College in Camrose. Be with them that they may learn the new song and sing each day of life with heart, soul and service a song of praise to you. God of David and our Ephesian sisters and brothers in Christ hear our prayer.

Or [16]

Presider or deacon

Gathered as the body of Christ, rich in the gifts of God, let us offer prayers for all who hunger and thirst.

Deacon or other leader

For *N* our bishop and *N* our presbyter, for this holy gathering, and for all who share the bread of life.

For the leaders of the nations, and for mercy, justice, and peace in the world.

For farmers and a good harvest, for travelers and those on vacation, and for safety from violent storms.

For all those in danger and need: the sick and the suffering, prisoners, captives, and their families, the hungry, homeless, and oppressed.

For the dying and the dead.

For ourselves, our families and companions, and all those we love.

Lifting our voices with all creation, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ. **To you, O Lord.**

Presider

God and Father of all, hear our prayers for all in need and fill your hungry people with bread from heaven; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Notes

[1] Martin Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962, p. 133/

[2] A. Baumann, [~~deleth~~], *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, (ed. by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren). Vol. III. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978, p. 232

[3] Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Translation and Commentary on Chapters 4-6*. Garden City, New York, 1960. pp. 496-497.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 426.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 454.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 432.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 434.

[8] *Ibid.* p. 437.

[9] *Loc. cit.*

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 438.

[11] *Loc. cit.*

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 497.

[13] Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (i-xii)*, Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., p. 263.”

[14] <http://www.worship.on.ca/text/rclb9900.txt>

[15] http://www.worship.on.ca/text/pray_b2.txt

[16] <http://members.home.com/oplater/prayer.htm>