

## On Being a Creature<sup>1</sup>

"Give us this day our daily bread," is our text for today. And right off there's a big problem. It's the word "daily." Scholars don't really know precisely what it means because in all of Greek literature it never appears. Think of the dilemma this poses. When the DeCelles had little kids and a dog at home we had a little vocabulary of made up words. For example, someone made up the word "mascarland." If I didn't tell you what "mascarland" meant to us, you'd have no way of knowing what it means.

Same thing with the Greek word behind "daily." Scholars can only guess at its meaning. What they've come up with is "daily," or "necessary," or "sufficient," or "tomorrows."

What I'd like to propose is that it may be a good thing that the precise meaning of this phrase is a little fuzzy. That fact may force us to look at what Jesus teaches in general about making requests and having enough food to eat. Maybe the ambiguity of "daily bread" might prompt us to look at the whole Bible and our whole faith to get a general principle.

As I thought about bread to eat my mind went to the prophet Elijah. We read about Elijah's in our Old Testament lesson. Elijah is scared and burned out in this scene. Queen Jezebel—one of the Bible's true villains—has vowed to kill him,

---

<sup>1</sup>Douglas DeCelle preached this sermon on October 11, 2009 at the First Presbyterian Church in LaGrange, Ga.

necessitating that he flee into the wilderness. Elijah picks an escape path into the wilderness that is reminiscent of the path Moses and others took. In the wilderness, Elijah collapses in exhaustion and despair. "Lord, I'm a goner. I've failed." He falls asleep. At length, an angel taps on his shoulder and Elijah wakes up to find "a cake baked on hot stones and a jug of water."

Elijah manages to revive himself and he finally reaches Mount Horeb—you know, where Moses got the Ten Commandments. Now, Elijah is no Moses. And while Elijah may think that when he gets to Horeb God is going to turn on the great fireworks of earthquake and thunder, what God actually does is to speak to Elijah in a quiet little voice. Which is all he needs.

Here's where I'm going with this. God isn't showering resources and inspiration and revelation on Elijah. He's giving him enough to get by. A little cake baked on hot stones and a jug of water is enough.

How often do we see in the Bible this pattern? God gives, but doesn't over-give. The Hebrew children wandering in the wilderness get daily bread. Abraham and Sarah are promised many descendants and a nation. When they die they have one child and their burial plots. The great nation comes, but what they see is the smallest imaginable fulfillment of God's promise.

In the New Testament, Peter pays his taxes by finding a coin in a fish's mouth—just the right amount. Jesus manages to get his disciples launched as the first leaders of the early church. But you've got to wonder if some of those disciples were about ten minutes away a couple of times from giving up the whole thing with Jesus and walking back to Galilee.

Here's the point. God always gives to his followers sufficiently to get them to where they needed to be. They manage to get enough food, enough safety, enough inspiration and information, enough personal support to make it at last to the destiny God has called them to.

So, Jesus teaches us to pray—Give us this day our daily bread, our necessary bread. Lord: you made us, we didn't make ourselves, we don't live under on our own steam, and we simply need some things to survive. We need you to give these to us.

Doesn't that prayer pick up on the great principle we see throughout the Bible? God isn't going to let us starve. God isn't going to crush us. Rather, God knows what we need and he provides sufficiently. He doesn't give us obscene amounts of stuff as we may think we want but he does take sufficient care of us.

I want to close by inviting myself and each of us to think for a moment of the whole sweep of our lives. We may not have

always been content at every point. But have we ever lacked what we really needed to reach our destiny as God's people? Have we had the food, the time, the freedom from the worst poverty, and enough love, enough information, enough inspiration to live as we've been called to live? Each of us needs to answer this question for him or her.

And for anyone in difficulty as you sit here—Elijah too was in big trouble. The queen wanted him gone. He felt himself to have failed. He was exhausted and alone. And an angel tapped him on the shoulder and he awoke to a little cake baked on hot stones and a jug of water. Not impressive. But enough. There's always enough. "Give us this day our necessary sufficient bread.

I think that's the sermon. Waking up to find that we have enough. We always have enough.