Exodus 16:13-21, John 6:1-14

“Beyond our daily bread”

 Well, I’m glad that we are able to put the conventions behind us. To be honest, whenever I look at how our political system works I get really encouraged. I know, for a lot of you it sickens you to see the money spent, the attacks on each other. I don’t like that either, but that isn’t part of the system, it is part of the people in the system. But what we just witnessed over these two weeks and what we will experience these next 3 months with it culminating on November 6 is something you will find nowhere else in the world.

 You see I lived 13 years in a country where on average every 8 months since WWII the government changed and they got a new prime minister. Italy. I spent a lot of time in a country where in past years there have been various uprisings and military coups. Honduras. I spent the last 5 years in a country that has free and open elections, although the same guy has been in power for the last 12 years and people fully expect him to be in power for another 12. Okay, the elections have been neither free nor fair. That would be Russia. There are many other examples that show that we are very unique so don’t let this political season discourage you.

 In fact, this time of year makes me even more proud to be an American than ever. But we are also the most powerful and economically stable nation in the world, in spite of the economic situation that we are facing. I know that I have never woken up in the morning wondering if I would have a meal that day. I never have woken up wondering about some of the basic necessities for that day. I attribute much of that to the fact that I’m an American and have lived in a country that has much.

 If you look back over our lives, our daily bread has been provided, hasn’t it? But this is not true for 2/3 of the world’s population. Most of the world wakes up every single day not sure if they will eat anything that day, certainly not even dreaming they would get 3 square meals, ever. Some of you remember Sydney from Liberia who came to First Presbyterian last year with the group from Moscow for our reunion.

 When he first got to Russia as a student the food that MPC provided was literally the only food he had. He baked a chicken they provided and he said he could make it last over a week. He volunteered in our soup kitchens that allowed him to have lunch every day. It was literally his daily bread that he felt God had provided for him through the church.

 Today, our Scripture focuses on God’s providing on a daily basis. The assurance of God’s daily provisions are startling if you step outside of this country and see how others live. Now, others also don’t need as much as we think we need to live, we’ll talk about that too. The air-conditioning in the church is such an example.

 But when we trust in God and know that he provides we can see beyond our daily bread. It allows us to work for his kingdom because we know that our needs have been and will be met. Let’s read.

**READ**

Our Scripture reading in Exodus is pretty shocking on a number of levels. The whole Exodus from Egypt and slavery is a lesson on daily bread. At one stage the Israelites state that they would rather be slaves back in Egypt with food than wonder if they will eat as free people in the desert. This desire to survive at times even exceeds the desire to be free. Think about it, would you rather be free and starving or a slave and fed with your daily bread? If you had to choose between the one and the other which would you choose?

 It seems like a silly question in the 21st century but it was one that people wrestled with daily in Exodus and even in Jesus’ day. It is also something that people wrestle with today in certain locations, but something we would never imagine having to face on a daily basis, so how do we relate to this Scripture? What we find in our Exodus reading today is God literally providing daily bread. Verse 13 begins with God providing quails nightly to the people for food.

 I’ll never forget the opportunity we had a few years back to climb Mt. Sinai in Egypt and as the 5 of us began our journey up at 5am we saw before us on the rocky path ascending up the mountain a quail that flitted before us almost reminding us of the history of God’s provision to His people on that very same mountain.

 As God provided those quails for them in the evening, in the morning when they woke up they found this white flaky substance and they had no idea what it was so they said to one another: what is it? Do you know how to say: What is it? In Hebrew? Of course you do. Manna means literally in Hebrew: What is it? It’s like at school you have the mystery meat.

 Moses gives them an answer in vs. 15. He doesn’t tell them the ingredients as you would expect, but rather he describes it as: “It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat.” The Lord provided. Now, Moses gives the clear direction on how to gather and care for the bread. Every day, you get enough for that day and for that day only. Except on the day before the Sabbath you get twice as much as you need because you are not to gather manna or cut grass on the Sabbath. It’s in there, I think.

 The people had to work every day to gather the manna. They couldn’t slack off for even a day because if they did then they wouldn’t eat. What I find most applicable to us today is that every morning when they woke up they may have been wondering, I wonder if God sent the what is it, the manna, today. Will it be here again today? And it was. We know that they did not always trust Moses whom they saw and so trusted God even less whom they didn’t see. Imagine every single day waking up and wondering if God would provide for you this day as well. Some of you know what that means.

 Most of the world knows exactly what I mean. Whether they trust or rely on God providing it, or not. Most of the world wakes up wondering from where will my food come. If we don’t wake up every morning wondering where our basic necessities are coming from, then we can take it for granted. We can easily move from a trust in God as we step out of our tent in the wilderness, to an assumption or an entitlement. Now I know that word entitlement is politically charged, but I would say that we all feel entitled as Americans to our daily bread either because of our hard work, our success, the help of the government, or whatever. There comes a sense of entitled when you are born American. This sense works against our trust in God. We wake up every morning feeling entitle to what we have.

 Our Scriptures today teach us to see the big picture that eliminates our sense of entitlement with a trust in the Almighty God. You know just as well as I do how from one day to the next everything can change. The Israelites were forced to live on a day to day basis, we aren’t always in that position.

 In John 6 Jesus’ miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 takes place. We know about the boy who had the loaves and the fish which is then distributed by the disciples to the people for that one single meal. You know, I’ve heard quite a bit of cynicism directed to the poor and especially when we were working in Russia. We were giving people daily meals and the criticism was that we weren’t solving the root or source of the problem. We were told that we were just putting band-aids on a much bigger problem. Well, sometimes you only have a band-aid. Sometimes it only takes that one meal to allow a person who has been battling to survive to be able to see enough forward to do something proactive for themselves. When all you are concerned about is your daily bread and survival it is often hard to see beyond that.

 Here in this miracle Jesus teaches us that it has to be one meal at a time. Philip is the one who Scripture says was tested by Jesus. He was the pragmatist of the group. Jesus poses the question in vs. 5: How can we buy enough food for everyone? Philip answers we can’t, it would cost us $20,000 to have a reception for everyone, it is impossible. We can’t do it. No, Jesus says, you can’t do it.

 But we aren’t the ones who ultimately provide our daily bread. It is by the grace of God that we have what we have and when we begin to feel entitled to it then we lose the trust that we need to have in order to see beyond our daily bread. This is where we want to end up as individuals is seeing beyond our daily bread to the promises that are provided for us.

 One of the key verses in this Scripture is verse 12. When the people were satisfied then he had the disciples go and collect the remainder. The concept of being satisfied with our daily bread and not always wanting more is foreign to us. Our penchant for materialism is described in Scripture as a sin that repeats itself generation after generation. That is why Jesus in Matthew tells us to not worry about tomorrow for it will take care of itself. God will take care of it, that has to be a part of our thinking. As a people that has so much we are especially susceptible to that.

 We have to be able to be satisfied with what God provides us. Some of us are never satisfied and we feel this sense of entitlement to keep getting more and more and never being happy with what we have. One of the most powerful Scriptures that I know which speaks to our ability of being able to see beyond our daily bread so that we can focus on God’s kingdom and not just expanding our lot is Lamentations 3:23 – “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning, great is your faithfulness.” It goes on and says, “The Lord is my portion.” Says my soul, “therefore I will hope in him.”

 When we trust that God will provide our daily bread then we can leave that to God and see beyond it and work for his kingdom and not ours. Amen.