

Chapel Hill United Church of Christ

Sunday Sermon

The Original C-Ration

Exodus 16: 2-4, 9-15
John 6: 24-35

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August 2, 2009

“For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

Prayer: O God, you are the Bread of Life. May we take our sustenance from you always. Amen.

With great respect for those in our congregation who have served our country in the military, I offer these details about C-rations and other meals provided by our armed forces. I hope my research is accurate. A *C-ration* is a basic meal for military soldiers in combat. That’s what the “C” in C-rations stands for: Combat. According to Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia: the **C-Ration**, or **Type C ration**, was an individual canned, pre-cooked or prepared wet ration intended to be issued to U.S. military land forces when fresh food (A-Ration) or packaged unprepared food prepared in mess halls or field kitchens (B-Ration) were impractical or not available, and when a survival ration (K-ration or D-ration) was insufficient (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/C-ration>, retrieved July 31, 2009). C-rations provided basic daily nourishment for soldiers, had some additional accessories in it like cigarettes and coffee, and by using the instructions within the package itself, a soldier could turn the tin cans into mini stoves and smaller can into coffee cups. All to provide what was necessary to sustain the soldiers out in the field on a daily basis.

In our day, we rarely give a second thought as to when and where our next meal will come, do we? Some of us live on meager meals, but for most of us, there usually is plenty, food’s

accessible, and a wide variety is almost always available. Ever been to one of our potlucks? Oh my! There's always an abundance of food, it's accessible, and a wide variety. Oh, the wonderful potato salad, baked beans, broccoli salad... Our prayer that we pray every day, "Give us Lord, our daily bread," seems to be answered all the time. I encourage each of us: be thankful at every meal. Say "grace" either before, during, or after the meal. Give the fact that you have food to eat a second thought, don't take it for granted, and thank God for it.

Ever think of what it would be like if our "daily bread" was taken away? Whoa! All we have to do is turn on the news, or a cable television channel and see places in the world where the basic daily bread is missing and we might even see what it's like. People are starving and suffering from malnutrition in parts of our world due to famine. Heck, there are people starving out on our streets and in our homeless shelters. So, be thankful, friends, that we have daily bread, and be thankful for the ways we help those who are hungry in our world. It is a work of God.

The ancient Israelites were a group of people who had food to eat but found themselves suddenly without it. Moses liberated them from the oppressive bondage of slavery in Egypt, took them out into the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land. But, along the way, the food ran out. They were on the brink of starvation! God heard their complaints via Moses, and God provided. It was what I call the "M-ration": manna and meat—for the masses!

But, God had a higher purpose in feeding the people manna in the morning and meat in the evening. Did you notice? After God told Moses what will be provided, God said, "Then you shall know that I am the Lord your God." In other words, provisions for physical nourishment

are intended to lead toward provisions for spiritual nourishment. The food provided for the people in the wilderness would lead them to a knowledge, awareness, and a trust in God. Sounds like the spiritual life, to me, you too?

Jesus wants the people of his day to grow a spiritual life, too. He wants them to have a knowledge, awareness, and a trust in God. Our passage picks up the day after Jesus fed the five thousand people with a meager five loaves of barley bread and two fish (John 6: 1-14). The crowd was looking for him the next day. In other words, their bellies were filled they day before, but now they were empty again. Jesus says essentially, “I know why you are looking for me. It’s because you had your bellies filled; not because you witnessed a powerful work of God. You got physically nourished, but you missed the spiritual nourishment.”

Then, through a series of questions asked and answered, Jesus leads the people to the truth about spiritual nourishment: just like God provided the M-ration for the Israelites continuously, God is now providing the C-ration continuously for all people. That’s what the “C” in the original C-rations stands for: Christ. Christ is the bread of God which comes from heaven and gives life to the world. Christ is the original C-ration. The people said, “Sir, give us this bread always.” Jesus said , “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry; whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” Our C-ration , our Christ-ration is available to us always. Our spiritual sustenance found in Christ is available to all people continuously.

Then why is there such spiritual starvation in our world? We can look around and see it everywhere. Just look at our political systems and its leaders—there is so much corruption, so much lack of humility and forgiveness, and in some circles there’s a strong sense that a

politician is above everyone else and even above the law. There's spiritual starvation there. Look at all the attention given to the gods (with a little "g") of our world—the god of power (witness terrorists kidnapping people and holding them for ransom), the god of consumerism (witness our insatiable desire to have the latest gadget), the god of our brand of justice (witness how people strive to place blame and to make sure that someone pays, someone is incarcerated, someone gets his or her 'just desserts.') There's spiritual starvation here. Witness the god of self-indulgence, the god of our own ego, and looking out for number 1 first and foremost. That's spiritual starvation. Witness the attention given to the god of more, more, more, instead of the attention given to the God of all creation who knows what we need and when we need it. "More, more, more" leads to spiritual starvation.

In my Daily Guideposts 2009 devotional book, Daniel Schantz's offering for (yesterday) August 1st metaphorically speaks of our spiritual starvation. He wrote of the time when the college he worked at was going through hard times and paychecks were delayed, and he fell into a panic (sounds eerily like those working for our state government, doesn't it?) Amid other family concerns that were expensive, he just couldn't see how God would provide, so he writes, "I took matters into my own hands. I began taking on extra work and stayed up late to meet deadlines. 'You're making yourself sick,' my wife warned. I began to be short with my wife [Sharon] and the girls, even my students and colleagues. My teaching suffered from a distracted mind. At the end of the year, Sharon figured up our taxes. "Your extra earnings put us in a higher tax bracket..." In the end everything extra I earned was wiped out. I had put my health, my marriage, and my job in jeopardy for nothing" (Daily Guideposts 2009, Guideposts, New York, 2008, pg. 214).

Spiritual starvation comes when we think that one or more of our little “g” gods will nourish us. Those are spiritual junk food! Sometimes it will momentarily, but in the end, the gods with a little “g” will take us away from the Christ ration, the true C-ration that is nourishment which lasts forever, that gives life to the world.

My encouragement for each of us is to have intentional desire to worship God, make an intentional decision to seek our original C-ration, Christ’s life-sustaining power. I encourage us not to think that God’s main purpose is to fill our daily needs. No, that’s not it. “We must never put our dreams of success as God’s purpose for us; God’s purpose may be exactly the opposite,” says Oswald Chambers (My Utmost for His Highest, Barbour and Company, Inc., 1935, 1963, July 28th, “After Obedience—What?” p. 210).

Rather think more deeply—God’s purpose, I believe, is to lead us again and again, if necessary, to a deeper truth, the truth about the bread of God. The truth about the spiritual food that endures. The truth that God has sent us bread from heaven, the original C-ration, in Christ, and gives life to the world. The truth that we need to trust in God. Let us be that part of the world that seeks it, believes it, receives it, delights in it, and is thankful for it. This is the work of God. Amen.