

## God's Provision: "What Is It?"

Have you ever been disappointed at God's answer? At the time you were really hoping for something more significant.

One of the greatest miracles in the Hebrew Scriptures was a major downer at the time it happened. The Hebrew people had about had it with Moses, his leadership cronies and most of all, they'd had it with God. Rumours had begun to trickle out that this was just a ploy to annihilate the over population of Hebrew slaves – to let them die in the desert.

Poor Moses! So much for great visions about a new future. He didn't even have the means to keep the people fed. Now he faced a leadership coup.

Why couldn't the people see things in the way that he saw it. I'm sure that's something that many pastors and boards have said many times since. So he took his concerns to God, and that evening this huge flock of quails just landed in the camp. Obviously, this was God's provision so everyone had a great feast.

So in the morning they went expecting another divine buffet, but instead the ground was covered with white stuff – literally "What is it?" What an anti-climax. Yet that was the miracle, for this mystery food stuff was God's provision, always available fresh when they needed it.

Our question for this evening: What do we want of God? The occasional big miracle and a life of hoping and being disappointed; or the assurance of God's daily bread being just enough?

I was raised in a church movement that was always living in the past. That's probably true for many churches. We always heard about the great revivals, the great healings, and that God was going to do it again, we just had to be more committed, pray harder and give more. And you know what? It didn't happen.

We're fortunate, in MCC, not to have that heritage; but we have to guard less we leave false hopes and expectations for the future of our church.

Did you know, you are what you eat? Or at least people with similar personality types favour similar snack food. This is the findings of the Smell and Taste Treatment and Research Foundation in Chicago. In her *Alternative Medicine* article "Message in the munchies," Lisa Turner says there's meaning in the types of munchies we munch:

**Tortilla chips:** You're a perfectionist. You're successful and ambitious, and you like to plan ahead. You have a strong sense of social responsibility and abhor injustice.

**Pretzels:** You're the life of the party. You love novelty and can quickly become bored with routine. You tend to start new projects before completing existing ones.

**Cheese curls:** You have a high sense of morals and ethics, and you insist on treating everyone fairly. You might seem uptight, but you're highly organized and methodical.

**Popcorn:** You're a take-charge type but with a modest, low-key demeanor. Confident but reserved, you would make a large charitable donation without telling anyone.

**Nuts:** You're even-tempered, easy to get along with and highly empathetic. Your easygoing, cooperative nature contributes to success at home and at work.

**Potato chips:** You're achievement-oriented, successful and competitive. You're a natural leader but can be easily irritated with inconveniences such as long lines and traffic jams.

**Crackers:** You're contemplative, thoughtful and often a loner. You prefer private time and shy away from confrontation and arguments; you can't stand to hurt another person's feelings.

**Meat snacks (such as beef jerky):** You're gregarious and generous, and you tend to be loyal to a fault.

Jesus declares himself "the Bread of Life", but what does it say about those who "feast" on Jesus. We read in our gospel reading (John 6:24-35), that an enthusiastic crowd remained at the meeting site when the miraculous feeding of the multitude took place. Jesus was probably talking with small groups and a remnant of the crowd settled in for the night.

They had become enthusiasts for Jesus — why? because they ate their fill of the loaves.

But there's a problem with this personality type. "Do not work for the food that perishes," warns Jesus, "but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Humanity will give you" (v. 27). The loaves that Jesus used to feed the 5,000 are "food that perishes," and he tells the people that they shouldn't focus their enthusiasm on this kind of bread. Instead, they should work for the food that endures for eternal life.

This verse captures the reason that Jesus has such mixed feelings about performing amazing miracles. Any loaves that he multiplies are going to be eaten, and then the people will still be hungry the next day. Any water that he turns into wine is going to be consumed, and then the wedding guests will still want more. Any paralyzed person that he heals is going to become old and then become crippled again. Any dead child that he raises to new life is going to grow up and then die of natural causes.

Miracles are tricky because they make a big impression and then disappear. They don't last forever. They're certainly not what is needed for spiritual growth, if anything they're the cheese curls, popcorn and potato chips of Christian living — a tasty snack for someone who already has faith.

Increasingly, in our consumer society, people shop for faith. Even in churches such as our own, there are always people that come to see what we're like. We welcome you and hope that you enjoy your experience. Just understand we're a work in progress.

In more mainstream church, what a church believes is no longer the key issue, rather it's about what programs are available, is it family friendly etc.

It is as important today that any church – our church - has a social justice voice in the same way that it has a spiritual voice.

I believe that is what Jesus meant when he spoke about being the Bread of Life .... Not something to physically feed on, but an agent of justice to nourish the world's real need. He also said that we were “the salt of the earth” – similar purpose.

Look at the things Jesus said: “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you” (Luke 6:27-28).

Bread like that is enough to make us choke. It would be so much easier to digest if he said, “Love your *friends*, do good to those who *like* you, bless those who *compliment* you, pray for those who *help* you.” Yes, if Jesus said these things, he would be feeding us spiritual chocolate, doughnuts and french fries — food that isn't bad in moderation but can hurt us if we over eat it.

This week I had a phone call from someone who wished to be anonymous. She feared that we would harass. She proceeded to complain about something that happened at the weekend – she used words like filthy and disgusting. She said I would know what she meant, even though she couldn't bring herself to mention, because I was there on the church float.

That is was miracle Christians are like – they rant and complain for God to save the world from its wickedness, yet have no power themselves. I was saved from hell – I used to go to a church like hers.

Because she refused to give her name, I refused to listen to her rants. Did it trouble me? At first I thought it was someone from church because of the way she started talking about our church .... That would have troubled me. But as soon as I she identified herself as a “real” Christian, I had no fear.

We cannot let fear motivate or dominate our faith – whether it is fear of God or fear of God's people. We're called to be salt, to be peacemakers, to be partakers in the bread of life.

What I need from God is the “What is it”. I don't know what it is, I just know it's my daily provision, my strength to be who I am, my power to know God is with me.