

Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread
(Lord, Teach Us to Pray, Part 5)

Matthew 6:11, 25-34

[A sermon preached by the Rev. Stan Gockel at the First
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I

Prayer is a dangerous thing.

And to pray the words of the Lord's Prayer is to walk along the edge of danger.

As we have seen in the previous weeks of this series,
the first half of the Lord's Prayer is "God-centered."

The first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer call us to pray for God's concerns,
for God's purposes to be carried out in our lives and in our world.

Specifically, we pray for God's name to be hallowed,
God's kingdom to come,
God's will to be done...
as in heaven, so on earth.

This morning we begin the second half of the Lord's Prayer—
and in this part we approach God with concerns that are personal in nature.

The second half of the prayer centers around our needs and desires as human
beings living on God's earth.

A little boy got down on his knees beside the bed and began to pray:

*"Dear God: Aunt Stella isn't married yet. Uncle Hubert hasn't got a job.
Daddy's hair is falling out. I'm tired of praying for this family without
getting any results."*

II

The fourth, fifth, and sixth petitions of the Lord's Prayer are for the family,

and they are dangerously personal in nature.

They are offered on behalf of our daily lives;
they are meant to satisfy our deepest needs.

They embrace past, present, and future—
our present need for food, shelter, and clothing.
our need to deal with past sins that still hold power over us;
our desire to be free in the future from the fear that temptation
and evil might separate us from God.

At the same time, these three petitions encompass the full range of human need.

Give us this day our daily bread is a prayer for the basic necessities of life—the physical needs that all of us have.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us is a prayer for our emotional needs, for the healing of relationships and a release from our sins and failures.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil is a prayer for our spiritual needs, for freedom from the powerful pull of temptation and triumph over the powerful force of evil.

All of our needs—
physical, emotional, and spiritual—
are summed up in these three petitions.

The order of the petitions is surprising.

We would have expected Jesus to deal first with spiritual matters—
for the prayer to read:

*"Lead us not into temptation...
Forgive us our sins...
Give us this day our daily bread."*

But the order of the petitions underscores a basic fact:
God is as concerned with our bodies as with our souls.

In fact, with God there is no neat division of body and soul.

We are creatures with physical needs that must be met,
sometimes even before our emotional and spiritual needs can be met.

God loves all of you...all the person that you are.

And it is right and proper to pray for the things we need.

The God who is concerned about the kingdom coming
is also concerned that you have enough to eat!

What an amazing juxtaposition...the kingdom of God and our daily bread!

III

So let us now turn to the first of these three petitions that comprise the second half of the Lord's Prayer: "*Give us this day our daily bread.*"

This petition is so rich in meaning that a number of prayers are implied by it.

One such prayer is, **Lord, that I may be faithful in my daily work.**

Here we learn how prayer works.

We are not to pray and wait...we are to pray and work.

Praying "give us this day our daily bread" does not absolve us from the responsibility of working to put that bread on the table.

The farmer plants the seed of wheat, and, of course,
it is God who makes the seed grow.

But still there are weeds to be pulled,
water to be applied,
plants to be fertilized,
the harvest to be gathered in,
flour to be ground,
dough to be kneaded,
bread to be baked.

Once there was a farmer who took over a farm that had long been in a state of neglect. He worked very hard to reclaim the land:

cutting back the underbrush,
clearing away the stones,
pulling the weeds,
fertilizing the soil,
planting and tilling the crops,

until he had a rich harvest of corn, wheat, and soybeans.

One evening he was showing it all to a friend, who commented,

"It's wonderful what God can do with a piece of ground like this."

"Yes," said the farmer who had worked so hard, "but you should have seen it when God had it all to himself."

Perhaps you've heard this saying:

*Pray as though it all depends on God;
Work as though it all depends on you.*

"Lord, make me faithful in my daily work."

IV

A second prayer implied by this petition is:

Lord, that I may live in child-like trust.

Any notion that Christianity is some kind of otherworldly trip into never-never land is dispelled by the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer.

The act of asking for bread is for us a daily reminder that our lives, like bread, are gifts from God.

"Give us this day our daily bread" is a prayer that daily reminds that we are dependent upon God.

Just like the Hebrews in the wilderness who would have starved had God not sent the gift of manna, so we would perish were it not for the daily, mundane, essential gifts of God.

In the papyri *epiusion*, which is translated as daily, is found in two contexts:
 at the top of a woman's grocery list,
 and in connection with soldier's rations.

So the phrase "give us this day our daily bread" clearly means that we are to pray
 for what is sufficient or necessary for this day,
 while trusting God day by day by day.

But so often our trust in God (or lack thereof) is like the story of the man who fell
 over the cliff.

Halfway way down he managed to reach out and grab hold of a branch. There he
 hung as he hollered at the top of his lungs:

"HELP! HELP! Is anyone up there to help me?"

At that point the heavens were opened, the hands of God appeared, and the voice
 of God said, "It's all right, Son. Just let go...I'll catch you."

Well, there was a long pause, and the man, with a frown on his face, called back,
 "Is anyone else up there?"

To be preoccupied with the past is to invite depression.

To be preoccupied with the future is to invite anxiety and worry.

To focus in the present, living one day at a time, is the pathway to trust.

"Lord, help me live this day in child-like trust."

V

A third prayer is implied by this petition:

Lord, that I may be content with a simple life.

Let's be honest: most of us don't think much about daily bread.

Why? Because for us, living as Christians in America, bread is not a problem.

Obesity is reaching epidemic proportions,
 and most of us suffer from too much bread rather than too little.

We fill the gnawing emptiness within through ceaseless consumption.

We are rich materially but impoverished spiritually.

And so when we pray, "Give us this day our daily bread,"
not only is it easy for us to take it for granted because we do have so much,
but we also fail to comprehend the implications of this prayer for
those who have little.

A woman in a little village in Honduras trudges up the mountain each morning to
gather wood and then carry it down the mountain for her cooking fire.

She then goes back up the mountain to fetch water for cooking the food.

She grinds the corn her husband has raised,
cherishing every kernel,
hoping that this season's corn will last through the winter.

The tortillas are made in the palm of her hand.

She fries them in the pan and feeds them one-by-one to her children,
the only food they will have that day to fill their aching stomachs.

That woman undoubtedly prays "give us this day our daily bread" differently from
the way you or I pray it.

In this culture of over consumption we ought to pray for the grace to be able to
say, "Give us the grace to know when enough is enough"
or "Help us to say 'no' when the world entices us with so much."

In praying this prayer, perhaps we will learn to "get back to the basics."

Perhaps we will become schooled in desiring what we really need rather than what
we want.

Perhaps we will one day be able to say with Paul:

"I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to

One of the monks answered, "Yes."

We live in a society that abhors dependence upon God or anyone else.

Yet every time we ask God for daily bread,
we acknowledge not only our dependence on a gracious and loving God,
but also our dependence on other people.

No bread comes to our table without the work, the sacrifice, and the gifts of
strangers whom we do not know and will never be able to thank.

Whether it's the migrant workers who picked the fruits and vegetables,
the truck drivers who delivered them to the stores,
or the grocery workers who stock the shelves,
we are all dependent on the hard work of strangers.

I can't help but think that is why Jesus taught us to pray,
"give **us** this day **our** daily bread,"
instead of "give me this day my daily bread."

We cannot help but notice that the pronouns are plural—
"us" and "our."

Always they compete with "I" and "mine."

Usually "I" and "mine" win.

The fact is, selfishness pervades so much of life.

Our politics has become a competition of special interest groups—
most of whom appear not to care what happens to other groups,
as long as their constituents get what they want.

Polls show the increasing materialism of our society.

And our experience tells us that most people's priorities are their own comfort,
entertainment, and good feelings.

But then comes a catastrophic event like Hurricane Harvey,

and we realize anew how helpless we are in the face of such cataclysms,
and how dependent we are on the all the other members of the human
community.

And we are reminded again that Jesus calls us to live always in a spirit of
gratitude,
and that as his followers we are prohibited from praying selfish prayers.

We pray for "us," for "our" needs.

Bread is not only a communal product,
but it is also a corporate responsibility.

As William Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas write:

*Our bread is not ours to hoard. Our bread belongs to our sisters and
brothers. Bread is God's gift which, like so many other good gifts of God,
we pervert by our selfishness.*

*To pray "Give us today our daily bread," is to radically reexamine
ourselves, to acknowledge the claim that God has placed upon us through
the gift of bread, to admit the responsibility we have for our neighbor's
need.*

And so we pray, "**Lord, help me to see my oneness with the entire human
family.**"

VII

Do you see now why to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," embraces so
much of what is important and meaningful and needed in our world?

When you go beneath the surface,
this is a prayer that will impact your entire life...
where you work,
how you spend your free time,
whom you chose as friends,
where you go on vacation,
what you do with your money.

Yes...even "your money"—

because the strength and the ability to work in our chosen field
and to earn money is a gift from almighty God.

And you thought it was a simple prayer for daily bread!

But didn't I warn you at the outset that prayer is a dangerous thing,
and praying the Lord's Prayer brings us to the very edge of danger.

May the One who said "I am the bread of life" give us the courage and the faith
always to pray,

"give us...

give all people...

the entire human family...

our daily bread."

Amen.

Sources:

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