

“For Daily Bread”

July 17, 2022

The Prayer Jesus Teaches series

Sunday of Mission Team return

During VBS week, we talked about bread a lot, and food a lot. And the verse from the Lord’s Prayer guided us: *Give us this day our daily bread*. Our first story was from Exodus 16 - the one referred to in John 6. It’s the story of God providing manna and quail for the Israelites when they were wandering in the wilderness. If you asked the kids, they might remember that the people were tired and hungry and hot. God provided just what they needed for the day - enough.

This prayer is Jesus’ gift to us. Yes, it’s a part of his foundational teaching, but it’s a gift. As Jeff Verry mentioned last week, many of us have prayed this prayer 100s or even 1000s of times. One of our more mature saints told me recently that it’s the prayer she prays when she finishes her devotional time with God. I can only imagine how many times these words have been lifted from her heart and how this prayer continues to form her as a disciple of Jesus.

Remember that this prayer is subversive. When Jesus prays for the Kingdom of God to come on earth, it’s a straight-up indictment to the Roman Empire. It’s praying for and working for God’s Kingdom that his followers are about. It’s the central thing that Jesus teaches. He talks about the Kingdom of God a lot.

We’ve covered the first two sections: *Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name...Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven...* We’ve been put in community with others by the grace of God. We’ve been called to pray for and work for the Kingdom. As Jeff mentioned, it’s not a self-improvement goal, but a goal to literally make this world more like what God wants it and wills it to be – where love, justice, hope, and help are the order of things. It’s where we love God and love each other.

I’ll confess that when we get to this phrase in the Lord’s Prayer, I have to catch myself and consider my prayer life. How do I pray faithfully for what I need - not just what I want? If we’re dialed into the intent of this prayer, Jesus has already offered the focus - *thy will be done*, though maybe you’ve struggled like me when I’m praying for *my will to be done*.

When we spend some time praying this prayer - and some time studying it – we might notice how the prayer Jesus teaches us builds on itself in each successive

phrase. Praying for daily bread has something to do with what comes before in the prayer: making God's name holy, God's Kingdom coming, and God's will being done - on earth as in heaven. Praying for daily bread - *our* daily bread - is still a community prayer. It's not just about *my* needs, but everyone's needs.

Jesus invites us to pray with a Kingdom perspective - seeing God's abundance and asking with confidence for what sustains us each day. But are we bold enough to ask? Some of us struggle to ask for help - for what we need - even from the people closest to us. Roberta Bondi writes that this reluctance to ask others for help may be connected with our difficulties in asking God for things in prayer, even daily bread.

I wonder if we assume that we're insignificant to God - that God is too concerned with other things and couldn't possibly be concerned with us. We saw images this week from the James Webb Space Telescope space - galaxies so far away, closer pictures of Jupiter - reminding us of the vastness of the world. **SHOW IMAGE** from James Webb Space Telescope

God's glory fills the earth and the heavens, and God is as close to us as our next breath - awe and intimacy. The promise we claim is that God who is Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of all that is is also the One who loves each of us and knows us intimately - and calls us to love one another.

The purpose of prayer isn't for us to ask for what we want, but to recognize what we need. One of the best images of this is something I heard a long time ago: "God is not a vending machine." Prayer isn't transactional - just getting what we want, but it's transformational - nurturing a relationship we have. Praying offers us perspective and grounds us in our relationship with God. God loves to hear us, and God loves to talk back, inviting us to listen, but maybe that's the harder part.

John Wesley says, "The end of your praying is not to inform God, as though he knew not your wants already; but rather to inform yourselves; to fix the sense of those wants more deeply in your hearts, and the sense of your continual dependence on [God] who only is able to supply all your wants. It is not so much to move God, who is always more ready to give than you to ask, as to move yourselves, that you may be willing and ready to receive the good things [God] has prepared for you."

Give us this day our daily bread is the first real petition of the prayer - the first time we're asking for something directly. And we have to understand what we're asking for. The wording that's been translated as "daily" needs some

explanation. The Greek word is *epiousian*, which doesn't really translate to "daily" as we think of it. Rather, it's more like "what's needed for us to be" or "what's essential." So maybe a better wording is this: **SLIDE** *Give us today that bread we need...to exist, to survive...*" How many of us have more than what we need for today?

I wonder if Jesus is thinking about that faith story in Exodus when he teaches this prayer because it reminds us that God is great - and that God can be trusted to provide what we need. I wonder if that's why we have this exchange in the Gospel of John and this powerful declaration: *I am the Bread of Life*. The needs of our bodies and our souls are important, and Jesus speaks to both.

Jesus invites us to seek what is lasting, eternal, and satisfying. We're invited to rely on God's provision. It's not a stretch to say that this is difficult, especially in a time when we're looking for the next best version of the newest phone or gadget, where storage units are still big business because we have a lot of stuff, where we want it all and want it now, and we don't want to be patient or even kind.

This phrase can also convict us if we allow it to as we consider the needs of others who are literally starving for enough to eat. That came to bear again as I listened to missionaries Dr. Les and Debbie Dornon share about the educating people about nutrition in Nepal - showing them how to make a protein-rich grain mix to feed their families. It's always a gut punch to hear that story that is so common around the globe when we sit in incredible comfort with ample food in our refrigerators, pantries, and deep freezers. *Give us today that bread we need...*

Jesus' words in John's Gospel come after he's performed healings and has fed the large crowd of thousands. People were ready to make Jesus king because of his ability to do miracles, but he goes off by himself. He walks on water to meet the disciples as they cross the lake. When the crowd realizes that Jesus and his disciples have crossed the lake, they look for him.

And Jesus confronts them. What do they really seek? Do they want bread that will fill them, or do they seek more - true fulfillment for their lives? The miracle of feeding thousands is more than a miracle because it points to the power of God at work in Jesus. He is the Bread of Life - the One whom God sends so that all might believe and be satisfied with food that endures - eternal life. So, there's this tension we hold as we pray.

I wonder if we're looking and seeking and wanting because we're feeling empty. For some of us, that might be the feeling that brought us to Jesus. We wanted what lasts, and we found it in him. For others of us, we may be in the midst of feeling empty and longing for something that will truly satisfy and bring peace that we so desperately need. *Give us today our daily bread...*

What needs do I have that only God can provide? Salvation is one of those needs. Only God offers that gift. What do I have that God can use to provide for others' needs? I have more than enough.

Somewhere in our praying, Jesus challenges us to acknowledge our dependence on God and the need for a grateful heart that can receive and give. I've come to believe that one of the most difficult things for us is to accept the gift of grace that God offers - knowing that we can't save ourselves or do enough to deserve God's grace - and also knowing that God works through people around us to show us unconditional love, and we're called to do the same.

Roberta Bondi explains her faith development as growing in a friendship with God as "longing for what God wants." We pray for the wellbeing of the people God loves. We open our hearts and share our petitions, even if they seem unworthy to us. We have an accountable relationship with God - praying and listening, praying and working. And we need God - and God needs us. Yes, God is Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, but God uses people to bring the Kingdom in its fullness - even those glimpses of the Kingdom.

I wonder if in our prayer for daily bread, Jesus helps us to understand that we have enough. And we have much to share so that others have enough, too. By praying these words, we're praying for everyone to have what they need. *Give us today our daily bread...* We're praying for wisdom to be a part of God's plan to provide - food, love, care, belonging, community. We're called to pray for work for our daily bread.

So, when our VBS kids packed trail mix bags for Kids' Food Basket, when we gather in the basement at Temple UMC serve at Supper House, when we pick up cans of soup or other canned goods for MAP, when our mission team serves a family in need, when we make space so that ALL are welcome, *Give us today our daily bread...*

When Jesus tells the crowd they've come because they had their fill and then pushes them to work, not for food that spoils, but for food that endures, we stand

convicted. Certainly, it's about providing for those in need. That's God's command throughout Scripture. Provide for those in need.

But Jesus challenges us to consider what it means to have food that endures. Jesus is not their king, he says, but the One sent from God to save by offering himself for the whole world. Maybe that's the challenge, too. Sometimes we take for granted what it means to follow Jesus. I want what's quick and convenient, but thinking about food that endures – the Bread of Life - and the demand and call on our lives begs us to consider what we're seeking. Is it just the quick fix? Is it just enough to sustain us for the day? We have enough.

Are we like those who came to Jesus wanting to know the secret why Jesus can do what he does and what he can do for us? Or are we seeking that Bread of Heaven - that gift of having what we need, knowing that it requires daily attention, daily struggle sometimes, daily joy, and knowing that it's a lifelong commitment?

Give us today our daily bread... Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven... They're connected. Are we working for the Kingdom? Friends, as we seek to be faithful to Christ, he is what we offer to the world. Even when we offer those tangible things, what we offer is the love of Jesus in tangible ways.

We don't have a quick fix for people who are struggling or a list of secrets that will make life easier. What we have is our own witness about what it means that Jesus loves me and how I strive to love him too. Jesus offered himself and we offer Christ to all whom we encounter. We are reflections the love of Christ for others.

So, as we pray today, as we work today for the Kingdom, when we pray that prayer (and I hope that we're praying it more than just on Sunday mornings). When we pray *give us today our daily bread*, it's about what we have – already enough – and what we can offer so that others have what they need. It's about that Bread of Life that Jesus offers - the gift of salvation, grace, and hope. Maybe it always be a gift for us as we pray for our daily bread.

Thanks be to God! Amen.