

Sermon Series: Praying Like Jesus
Our Daily Bread
Matthew 6:9-11

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For those of us who have an abundance of bread, it might be hard to understand why Jesus would have us pray in this way: “Our Father in heaven, whose name is holy...give us today enough bread for today...”. Most of us have enough bread for today, tomorrow, and for many tomorrows to come. We have not known, an absence of bread, have not experienced the pangs of hunger. None of us, thanks be to God, have ever watched our children starve to death right before our eyes. Even though there are some 22,000 people who die each day from hunger-related causes they remain for us mostly statistics, numbers, not neighbors. We do not know their names, have not seen their faces. And yet Jesus teaches us that if we are going to follow him, if we are going to be children of the Father whose name is holy, we must pray in this very particular way – “give us today enough bread for today.”

The past Sunday’s I have tried to emphasize Will Willimon’s observation around how our Lord’s prayer directs our attention toward the Father in heaven whose name is holy while keeping us firmly grounded on earth. The Christian faith, life with Jesus is incarnational. As Willimon puts it, “Any notion that Christianity is some sort of otherworldly trip into never-never land is dispelled by the time our Lord’s prayer gets down to the nitty-gritty, boldly political task of praying for bread.” He writes, “The act of asking for bread is for us a daily reminder that our lives, like our bread, are gifts from God. Daily we are dependent upon God. Just like Israel in the wilderness who would have starved had not God sent the gift of manna, so too we would perish were it not for the daily, mundane, essential gifts of God. It is God who gives and sustains life. And so, we are bold to ask for material, life-giving things like our daily bread. Furthermore, amid all the talk about heaven, and God’s holiness, and God’s Kingdom, Jesus’ prayer now reminds us that we are flesh and blood people who live by bread. And God redeems our full humanity. Salvation is not the liberation of our souls to go to heaven when we die and escape this temporary, decaying world. Salvation is the redemption of all of creation, and all of us, heart, mind, soul, and body. In raising Jesus from the dead bodily, we see that our bodies matter; that God is concerned with things like his children having enough bread to eat. Salvation is the realization not only that our lives are gifts, but that our lives are daily dependent upon bread, which Jesus’ prayer teaches us to regard as a gift, not something we earn or deserve but a gift. Which means that God loves to feed us, loves to provide for us, loves to satisfy our hunger – spiritual *and* physical hunger.”¹

¹ Will Willimon, *Lord, Teach Us*, p. 70

The gospels are full of stories about food, feeding people, hungry people, daily bread, table stories, Jesus eating with outcasts and sinners, stories telling us that Jesus is himself the bread of life. You may recall the scene when Jesus went out on the lake with his disciples so they could find a quiet place and report how their ministry was going. *Someone saw them going and the word got around. From the surrounding towns people went out on foot, running, and got there ahead of them. When Jesus arrived, he saw this huge crowd. And at the sight of them, his heart broke—like sheep with no shepherd they were. He went right to work teaching them. When his disciples thought this had gone on long enough—it was getting late in the day—they interrupted: “We are a long way out in the country, and it’s very late. Pronounce a benediction and send these folks off so they can get some supper.” Jesus said, “You do it. You feed them.”*

They replied, “Are you serious? You want us to go spend a fortune on food for their supper?” But he was quite serious. “How many loaves of bread do you have? Take an inventory.” That didn’t take long. “Five,” they said, “plus two fish.” Jesus got them all to sit down in groups of fifty or a hundred. He took the five loaves and two fish, lifted his face to heaven in prayer, blessed, broke, and gave the bread to the disciples, and the disciples in turn gave it to the people. He did the same with the fish. They all ate their fill. The disciples gathered twelve baskets of leftovers. More than five thousand were given their daily bread.²

“Give us today, O Lord, enough bread for today.” All that we have and all that we are is a gift from God. As Willimon goes on to say, “Jesus is the one who has compassion on hungry people. He is the Savior for whom hunger is an affront to the in breaking of the Kingdom of God. He is the host who feeds us, the will of God in the flesh who reminds us that God’s will is for all to be filled with good things. Jesus is the good teacher who commands us, he doesn’t invite or ask, he commands us, ‘You give them something to eat.’ As John Pavlovitz observes, “Jesus prepared a meal for the multitudes to remind us that as Kingdom people who pray his prayer, we feed people not because we believe they deserve it, but because they are hungry.” And wherever there are people who hunger for their daily bread, who hunger for the bread of heaven, there is a place on earth where the Father’s Kingdom is yet to come. Israel, Isaiah tells us, would know its Messiah at the table. When the Messiah comes, those who are hungry will be fed.”³ The Kingdom of God, for which we work and pray, is a meal for the hungry and the forgotten. On the day of our Lord, when God’s Kingdom comes and God’s will is done, Isaiah says there will come forth from the earth a great shout:

Come, all you who are thirsty,
come to the waters;
and you who have no money,

² Mark 6:30-44

³ *Lord, Teach Us*. p. 71.

come, buy and eat!
 Come, buy wine and milk
 without money and without cost. (Isaiah 55:1)

Jesus, the Church claims, is the fulfillment of Isaiah's vision. And not only is he the host of the banquet, he is himself the bread that satisfies all hunger. Jesus often ate with outcasts and sinners, with the sick and the poor, those who had no money to buy their daily bread. His table fellowship with them is a foretaste of what Isaiah prophesies and he calls us, his followers, here and now to do the same – to make room at the table, to welcome and feed those who long for their daily bread and who long for the bread of heaven.

Holy Communion points us in that direction. There is enough bread there for all. Just like by the sea when Jesus fed thousands with a few loaves and fish, so at our Lord's Table, Jesus our host, once again feeds all who come, satisfies our hunger with the bread of heaven. You see Holy Communion isn't primarily a private, individual act of devotion. It is a Kingdom act in that it previews and points to that day when our Lord's Prayer will be fulfilled and all will have their daily bread.

Our gathering here at the Lord's Table is rehearsal for life in the world. Because, until that day when God's Kingdom comes and God's will is done fully, Jesus commands us, we who have received our daily bread, to leave the table, to go back into the world and have compassion upon the crowds. We who have an overabundance of bread are commanded to feed our hungry neighbors both with the bread that satisfies physical hunger and to offer the bread of life which nourishes the soul because in the presence of Jesus, and in the presence of Jesus' people, there should be no one who goes hungry.

So, there are a couple of subtle things about praying for our daily bread that Willimon points out in *Lord, Teach Us* and which I don't want us to miss. First, "note that we pray only for our *daily* bread...To pray for more would tempt us to try and live as if we were other than those who live only by the will and working of a gracious God."⁴ Our hard work and effort are not the source of our lives, our cleverness and ingenuity cannot sustain or lengthen the lives we've been given. Life, like daily bread, is a gift.

If we have more than enough, it is not because we've worked hard and deserve it, and therefore others who have less do not. Might it be, as Thomas Merton once asked, that God has blessed us with abundance so that we might be generous? If we find ourselves standing among the crowds with five loaves and two fish, might it be that we've been placed there precisely for the holy vocation of offering hungry people their daily bread? If we find ourselves with spirits filled to

⁴ *Lord, Teach Us*, p. 73.

overflowing because we've feasted on the bread of heaven might it be that we have been so blessed so that we might offer the bread of life to others? When manna was given in the wilderness, the Israelites were permitted to gather only as much as they needed for each day. This is so they might never lose sight of their total dependence upon God. "daily we must reach out to God who reaches out to us. Daily we wake up to the realization that, if we are here, if our lives have any significance and substance, it is only because of the daily gifts of God."⁵

"Give us today our daily bread" does not mean "give it to us in sufficient quantity for the next decade." Jesus' prayer keeps us rooted in the moment, it doesn't look into the future, but is content to live in the present, trusting each day to the care of God. This prayer turns anxiety and worry into confidence and trust. What would we do if we could not worry? What if we somehow managed not to worry about our finances, our health, our family, our jobs, our homes, our parents, our friends, our church, the economy, the kids? Most of us worry some, some of us worry a lot, and all of us struggle to live, as Jesus tells us, trusting in the God who feeds the sparrows...who clothes the lilies... who numbers the very hairs of our heads...who says to us, "seek first God's kingdom, and everything else you need will be provided as well."(Goeckel) The petition, "Give us this day our daily bread" is a call to trust in God. It's an invitation to live life the way the apostle Paul describes, "*I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.* (Phil. 4:11b-13)

Secondly, it is significant that we pray not for *my* daily bread, but for *our* daily bread. This is why Jesus instructs his followers to share their bread with the crowds saying, "You give them something to eat." In one of his sermons, St. Basil the Great pointedly reminds us that nothing that belongs to us is ours alone, particularly what we have in excess, our daily bread.

He writes, "The bread that is spoiling in your house belongs to the hungry. The shoes that are mildewing under your bed belong to those who have none. The clothes stored away in your closet belong to those who are naked. The money that depreciates in your treasury belongs to the poor!"

Our bread is not ours to hoard. Our bread belongs to our sisters and brothers, to our hungry neighbors. In fact, even our lives are not our own to do with as we please. Our lives belong to God, we belong to God, or again as Paul puts it, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body." (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) It's what we've been praying in the Wesley covenant prayer, "I am no longer my own but yours...". And

⁵ *Lord, Teach Us.* p. 74

it's the life Jesus calls us to when he invites us to make holy the Father's name and to pray for God's kingdom and will and for ordinary things like daily bread.

Jesus looked upon the crowds and had compassion because they were like sheep without a shepherd and they had no bread for the day. *"You give them something to eat," he said. Quickly the disciples found five loaves and two fish. Jesus took the five loaves and two fish, lifted his face to heaven in prayer, blessed, broke, and gave the bread to the disciples, and the disciples in turn gave it to the people. He did the same with the fish. All ate and were filled, enough bread for the day.*

Lord grant us the holy audacity to pray boldly, and to work tirelessly so that all your children will have full stomachs and full hearts until your Kingdom in heaven comes and your will is done.

Let us pray...

Bless, O Lord, our daily bread. And give today bread to those who are hungry, and a hunger for justice to those of us who have plenty of bread. Amen.