

Teach Us to Pray: One Day at a Time

Exodus 16:1-8 Matt.6:25-34

3rd message in our series on the Lord's Prayer. We come now to the part of the Lord's Prayer where there is a shift from a focus on the bigger picture of God's name & character, and God's will & God's Kingdom, to a focus on humanity's needs, and how God provides for those needs. The language changes from "you" and "your," to "us" and "our."

This morning's petition from the Lord's Prayer is: give us this day our daily bread, and our gospel reading is a well-known one from Matthew 6:25-34.

Matthew 6:25-34

25 'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? ²⁸And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ³⁰But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹Therefore do not worry, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear?" ³²For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³But strive first for (seek first) the kingdom of God and

God's righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

34 'So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God!**

Story: a little girl praying at bedtime as her mother tucks her in. Her mom asks her to say her prayers, and her daughter just recites the alphabet. Mom asks, "Why did you do that?" She said, "I don't know what to say, so I give God all the letters and let him make the words." That's a good reminder: we can pray simply, and sincerely, because, as Jesus said, "Your Father knows what you need before you ask." God knows our heart, and knows what we need; so we can let God make the words for us. My college pastor once told us: sometimes the only prayer we need to pray is, "Ugh..." God knows what to do with that!

This morning we are reflecting on the petition, "Give us this day our daily bread." It is the shortest of the petitions in the Lord's Prayer. It's so simple, yet packed with so much significance.

This line, and the teaching of Jesus we just heard remind us that *God is good, and our good God provides for us*. Jesus says, the Father gives good gifts to his children, as we heard in last week's reading from Luke's gospel. We need to

be reminded of that truth again and again. Jesus affirms: we parents think we know how to give good things to our kids, how much more will our Father/Mother in heaven give us what we truly need—the right things.

That's what the promises tell us. God listens and provides. God is not the unmoved mover, who may or may not respond, and may require you to go and do something to prove your worth and then maybe, if you're approaching him just right and if he's in a good mood, he'll do something for you. No, God listens, always, with an eagerness to hear us, and God acts on our behalf with what we need. It may require persistence on our part, but our heavenly Father—out of a heart of goodness and an ability to act—will provide for our needs.

This is what Jesus affirms in this wonderful discourse, “Do not worry about your life... look at the flowers of the field and the birds of the air” and all that. He's saying, God is *glad* to provide your everyday needs; tomorrow has enough worries of its own, so focus on today, and see how gracious your Father is to provide for your *everyday* needs. Don't you love that line, today's trouble is enough for today; tomorrow will bring worries of its own? That rings true!

So that's the affirmation here—a reminder that the One to whom we pray is good, and desires to give good gifts to us.

In light of that, how does this simple petition, “Give us this day our daily bread” impact our day-to-day living? In at least two ways.

1. Praying this petition calls us to a life of *daily dependence* on our good-giving-God: the petition is, give us this day our daily bread. Not *weekly* bread or our *annual supply*. This is the ‘one day at a time’ aspect of this prayer.

This is how the people of old lived. It’s actually the only way they *could* live, for the most part, without refrigerators and Tupperware and other ways to keep food. They could store grain and some crops, and preserve meat with a lot of salt for a little while, but mostly the population lived day to day. As do many people around the world today, still.

Jesus no doubt had the Exodus story in mind with this petition. Where the Israelites had to depend on God, daily, for manna—that strange bread from heaven. Btw, the word “manna” in Hebrew means, “*What is it?*” That’s what they got each day, more “*What is it?*” The people were to eat their portion of the daily manna as they gathered it, and they were not to hoard it. And as we heard from our reading, this daily dependence on God wasn’t easy for them. The people complained, but God wanted them to learn to trust that their daily

needs would be met. And, with the exception of the weekly sabbath, when they were given one extra day's worth, if they tried to store more than one day's worth of manna, it spoiled. So they would learn to trust God day to day.

But the lesson of daily dependence isn't an exercise in testing our patience (like the people of Israel thought it was), as much as it is a revealing of God's desire that we learn to live in the present, every day, and throughout each day, and find delight in the good and simple gifts that God gives us each day, and give thanks for the basic needs God provides for us each day. To try to live one day at a time, so that we can enjoy what is before us, with gratitude, and learn to trust God, who provides for our everyday needs.

Now, I need to pause for a moment and say: this sounds simple, yet it's one of the hardest things to do. So we may poke a little fun at the Israelites for their complaining; but if I'm honest with myself, I'd probably complain too if I were in that situation. I'm *not* in that situation and I complain sometimes! Because living in the present, one day at a time, isn't easy. Yet it's worth practicing and working toward, and it does get easier over time. And, the benefits of living in the present are many, in terms of peace of mind and heart,

and an ability to see the good around us, the simple gifts and abundant beauty that are before our eyes and ears and our bodies from day to day.

The challenge, however, is that we live in a time and culture, unlike the people of old, where the majority of us are amply supplied, and where we do have refrigerators and freezers and ways to package food so it lasts. And we have Costco warehouses that allow us to stock up! And in this context, it's easy to live somewhere else but in the present, and to live without a sense of *daily* dependence upon God for basic necessities, because our pantries and refrigerators are well-stocked, and we may be tempted to think that we have provided for our own needs. The other temptation is to become anxious about what we don't have, but *want*. And then in our minds, wants become needs. Especially if the advertising industry has its way.

I don't believe that Jesus is teaching us not to think about the future or to plan for the future, or not to stock our pantry at home. He *is* teaching us not to **worry about** the future, and to try to live in the present, with gratitude and an acknowledgement of our dependence on our good God who has graciously provided what we need each day. So then, we can truly enjoy it!

Last week I was thinking back to when we were sheltering in place during Covid and was remembering how many times I said—with so much sickness, quarantine, businesses having to close down for a time, some of them going *out of business*, not to mention all of the political rancor and the other tensions of 2020-21, and us not knowing where this was all headed and what the future held—I found myself frequently saying: “This is one big exercise in living one day at a time.” Because we didn’t know what the outcome of all of it would be. And, in many ways, we are still in it—not covid, but the aftermath of that, which seems to have propelled us into a time of greater unravelling and disorientation. Which will resolve at some point. For now, though, we’re in the thick of it.

We have to continue to learn to live one day at a time. And for some people the fear of what’s going on is real; the uncertainty of the future is real. And so the wisdom of Jesus, in the Lord’s Prayer, applies to that fear: give us this day what we need. Just for today. Tomorrow will bring worries of its own, and we can’t control all of that. What we *can* control is how we choose to live *today*. And how we choose to act, today, within each of our sphere’s of influence.

Btw, in the reading from Exodus we heard the Israelites complain that they wanted to go back to Egypt. “At least we had three square meals a day; life was

predictable; we could be nice slaves in an ordered world.” But God had something else in mind for them: to trust him, day by day, to provide for them and not let them starve, as God led them toward a new future, a new land.

Friends, in a way, we (and everyone) are being led through a kind of exodus, through a wilderness. And we’re not going back; God is leading the world forward. And God is leading the Church forward; God is leading you and me forward. There will obviously continue to be things that are familiar, but much will be different and the world will be changed as we move forward, *if we trust God’s leading day to day, and choose to cooperate with God in doing God’s will.* This is one big exercise in trust, and learning to live day by day, as the Israelites had to. And as Jesus graciously instructs us to do. Seek first the Kingdom, here and now; God will take care of you. Delight in what you have, and what is provided for you, *today.*

Recently I heard someone ask their friend, “Which season of the year is your favorite?” Her answer: “The one I’m in. If it’s spring, I love spring. If it’s winter, I love winter.” That’s a good response of acceptance, and choosing to live when & where you are at the moment. Even if we do have a favorite season! “Wherever you go, there you are.” So, be where you are.

Perhaps you have heard of the serenity prayer, written by pastor/theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (almost 100 years ago). It's used in recovery groups, AA, AL anon, NA, and so forth. We are probably familiar with the first part, but there is a second part that goes unsaid, but is just as vital and wonderful as the first part.

The prayer begins with the familiar lines:

"God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things that I can, and wisdom to know the difference."

That's awesome by itself, but the prayer continues:

"Living one day at a time, enjoying one moment at a time, accepting hardship as a pathway to peace; taking, as Jesus did, this world as it is, not as I would have it, trusting that you will make all things right, if I surrender to your will; so that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with you forever in the next."

That's an excellent prayer, don't you think? And you don't have to be in recovery from addiction to use it! Although, if we're honest, we are all recovering from something. Maybe not a substance, but from faulty thinking, self-absorption, pride and ego.

Give us this day our daily bread. Praying this short petition from the Lord's Prayer invites us to acknowledge our dependence upon God, and live in the present, one day at a time, with gratitude.

2. Praying this petition also calls us to live a life of *simplicity and solidarity*: the prayer is for our daily bread. Underlying this prayer is a life of *simplicity*. Jesus doesn't teach us to pray for daily filet mignon with garlic mashed potatoes and crème brulee for dessert. There's nothing wrong with that (although if that was our daily meal, we'd probably develop some heart problems); however, that isn't what we are taught to pray for. The prayer calls us to a life of simplicity, where we keep our desires focused on true needs. Basic needs. Like bread.

Bread is and always has been a common staple of food around the world in every culture. Some form of bread, at least—tortilla, naan, matzah, rice, and so forth. In some cultures bread is also the utensil or bowl or plate that holds the main course, so it isn't just food, it's a practical part of eating.

So, in praying for daily *bread* we're praying for what is simply necessary for living day by day. One commentator said: when we pray this petition, we are praying for "that which is necessary for the preservation of life." That expands the prayer to mean not just bread, but *any* daily provision that helps sustain life. In many places around the world these days, that includes clean water. Give us

this day our daily *water* is a modern way to pray this prayer. We're praying for *simplicity* in having our true needs met.

And we pray this, not only for ourselves; we are praying this for others too.

And that's the *solidarity* aspect of this petition (and all of the petitions, actually). Note the pronoun: give *us* this day *our* daily bread. Not "me" and "my." Same with "our" father in heaven, and the rest of the petitions, which are in the third person plural. Forgive *us*, deliver *us* from evil, etc.

So even when we are praying this prayer by ourselves in quiet and solitude, it keeps us mindful of others, and helps us remember that we are praying it *with* others. And as others are praying it, they are praying it *with us*. It's the gathered community of faith that is taught to pray this—usually together—and we can expand our understanding of this to mean God's people worldwide, as it is prayed by God's people worldwide, in solidarity.

That's such a cool thing to remember: when we pray this we join sisters and brothers in central and south America, Japan, Madagascar. We join persecuted Christians, the poor and refugees, and world leaders who are seeking wisdom in their leadership.

Yet while this is prayed by Jesus' followers, it isn't exclusive. Because it calls us to be mindful of *anyone* who is looking for daily provision. When we are asking for our daily bread, we are praying for all of humanity to have enough for each day. We are *praying* on behalf of those who don't have enough, and we also become willing to *share* with those who don't have enough. As we are supplied with daily bread and more, we share the *more*.

We learn in Exodus 16 that when they gathered manna, some gathered much and some gathered little, but everyone had enough and it was to be shared. Think about it: the Israelites were on a journey of *survival* in wilderness, and therefore their ability to survive, together, depended on their sharing with each other.

And in some ways, we on planet earth seem to be on a journey of survival these days, and those who have more than enough need to hear the call to live more simply, so others may simply live. The reports on world hunger, and hunger in our own country, and even in our own community, are eye-opening, and heartbreaking.

And I'm proud to be part of a congregation that is generous in your support of feeding the hungry through programs like Nourishing Network, supporting our

local food banks, and even meals on wheels; there are hungry seniors in our community too. Let's keep up the good work!

Our prayer this week: give us this day our daily bread. Or, help me to live in the present, one day at a time. Or, help me to be grateful that my daily needs are provided for (make a gratitude list of all the "daily bread" you have). Perhaps your daily prayer this week is to see where there is a need, and provide it, for those who don't have daily bread.

If Thou but Trust in God to Guide Thee. Wonderful words...