

March 23, 2025

Bread for Every Day - Matthew 6:9-13

Every single word and line of the Lord's Prayer is worth a sermon itself. After all, it is probably the most well-known Christian prayer; the prayer said by most Christians at least every Sunday and the prayer given to us directly from Jesus. But today, in keeping with our Lenten theme, Bread of Life, I'd like us to turn our attention to the line: give us this day our daily bread.

It sounds simple enough, but there is a lot going on in those 7 words.

For the last year, Evie and I have been reading books from the Percy Jackson series together (there are a LOT of books in the series). The books bring the ancient Greek myths into the present day through the eyes of Percy, son of Poseidon, the Greek god of the seas and a human mother.

Also, this year, my husband Brian, has been teaching a class at Carthage College and one of the texts they read in the class is the Enuma Elish, an ancient Babylonian text which tells the story of the god Marduk's victory over the forces of chaos and his establishment of order at the creation of the world.

So, this year I've been rather immersed in stories from other civilizations about the god's they worshipped, which has really made things from Christianity like, the simple phrase: "give us this day our daily bread" stand out in new ways to me, because I see how many other civilizations believed in gods who they understood to have no interest in humans unless they were using them for something they needed. The Greek and Babylonian gods would kill humans on a whim or create bizarre tests for humans as entertainment or cause human suffering for their own vendettas against each other or merely because they were hangry or frustrated. The stories of these gods tell about

gods who have no real care for or investment in whether whole civilizations lived or died, much less any concern for individuals and their well-being.

Which makes a line like “give us this day our daily bread” something unique. Jesus encourages us to speak to God about our daily, individual, basic needs. Jesus paints a picture of a God who truly cares about humanity at large as well as us as individuals. Jesus’ God provides for people. After all, a literal reading of this phrase is very simple as our most basic human need is food. When we don’t have food, it is almost impossible for us to focus on anything else.

When I go with Covenant members to serve at the food pantry each month, the people who come in are from every background you can imagine - single parents, grandparents raising kids, seniors, immigrants, young adults, different races, different languages, different reasons why they find themselves in need of food. They all have other things they could be doing or actually really need to do but making sure they are at the food pantry on Tuesday between 4 and 6 is the most important. I can watch and see most of the people experience some kind of relief when they get their food and know they will have enough to eat for at least a few days.

Jesus tells us that we worship a God who cares about our daily needs. God is with us when we stand in line to buy our groceries or get what we need from the food pantry. God is with us when we make our meals and at the table when we sit down to eat them alone or together. God has created a world with the delights of fresh strawberries and the sweetness of honey and the good smell of baking bread. God has given us bodies which can turn food into muscle and energy. God is with us when we are worried about where our next meal will come from and has provided a world with all we need, if we would just distribute it well. But let’s come back to that.

Some people of Jesus’ time, and ours as well, would have people believe that the only thing God cares about is our salvation. In other words, having a relationship with God is

only relevant to whether we are going to “get in” to heaven. But Jesus knows what it is to be poor and to have an empty belly and he never tells the poor that they should just learn to live with their earthly suffering and focus only on the hope of a future joy in heaven. While we believe that in the life after this one, we will never need to worry about where our food is coming from, Jesus taught us about a God who was just as concerned with our here and now, as any afterlife. When we pray “thy kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven,” we are acknowledging that God’s kingdom is both here, now, as well as still to come, but what that tells us is that God desires, God’s will, is for earth to resemble heaven which means that even on earth God cares about our basic, daily needs. So, the first important thing about this phrase “give us this day our daily bread” is that it’s most literal reading – just the simple asking God to provide our daily needs - is a radical understanding of who God is and how much God cares about even the most daily, ordinary parts of our lives.

But there is even more to this line than literal bread. This prayer is a part of Jesus’ longer teaching we refer to as the Sermon on the Mount and just a little further on in Matthew, Jesus says, “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? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.” When we pray “give us this day our daily bread” it is also a reminder to ourselves to trust God for what we will need today.

Most of us live lives of full bellies and stocked refrigerators, so praying for daily bread doesn’t resonate with us as it might have in the crowd Jesus was speaking to that day. But, even if we aren’t worried about where our next meal will come from, it is certainly true that every one of us carries around worries about things in our lives and frets about

the future. What will happen to us tomorrow? What will happen down the road? We worry about our material things, our health, our loved ones, our jobs, our security.

But when we pray “give us this day our daily bread” it serves as a reminder that we are not in control – not of today and certainly not of tomorrow. Our whole lives are a gift. We ask God to “give us our daily bread” because even if we have stored up enough bread for a year, it is important for us to remember we didn’t invent the wheat or create the water. Each time we find our needs met Jesus invites us to focus on our gratitude for what we have instead of being consumed with if we’ll have enough tomorrow too.

Each day and everything in it is a gift from God. If we can trust God with today, we can trust God with tomorrow. And if we can trust God with tomorrow, then we can let go of the anxiety and desperation which so often leads us to hoard resources in our attempt to “secure our future.” Because it is hoarding in an effort to secure our tomorrows that leads to all kinds of problems in the world.

When we look around the world and see such great disparities of resources among people and nations, if we are honest with ourselves, we know the problem is not God’s provision, but our distribution of the gifts God has given us. We know there is enough food to feed all who are hungry. We know that it is possible to give shelter to all who are without. We know there is enough money to meet the basic needs of every person and enough medicine to take care of the sick. We know this in the big, worldwide sense, but we also know it here in our community. I know I am not the only one to look at the cereal aisle or go to Costco only to feel overwhelmed by the abundance of food and ashamed to know how many people, even right here in our community, are going to bed hungry every night when the shelves are stocked so abundantly. This kind of disparity is what happens when we stop focusing on what we need for today and instead hoard our resources, gathering them up in a desperate belief that we can make ourselves safe.

This prayer asks us to change our mindset from one that looks at the world and sees all the people who have more than we do to a mindset where we ask ourselves “do I have enough for today”? If the answer is “yes”, then we must decide what we will do with our “extra.”

Which brings us to the third important part of this phrase “give us this day our daily bread.” Just like this prayer doesn’t begin, “my Father,” but with “Our Father,” the choice to pray “give us” instead of “give me” tells us something important about what Jesus was trying to instill in us.

Jesus is calling us to pray not as an individual, but as a people, **a people** of faith. This prayer is meant to remind us that we are connected to each other. Which means when we pray “give us this day our daily bread” it means we aren’t just praying for ourselves to have enough bread today, but that everyone would have enough bread today. So, if we pray this prayer and are clear that our basic needs for today will be met, then our prayer should convict us to look around to see if there are folks who are still hungry. And sadly, because we haven’t done a good job distributing the gifts God has provided, it will never take long for us to find someone who is hungry.

Some things I’ve been watching very carefully in the news are the cuts from the federal government for things like food banks, school lunches, farmer subsidies and soup kitchens. Whatever you may think about the federal government’s role in society, these cuts will absolutely mean hungrier people in our communities. I have been surprised at how many people I’ve spoken with lately and over the years who think the churches who host food banks and soup kitchens raise all the money for the food and whatever else they need by themselves. But the truth is that a large number of these programs receive federal funds to run, even if they also receive gifts from individuals. So, if our tax dollars are no longer going to go to these kinds of programs, the risk of a lot of people becoming even hungrier than so many are now, is going to be very real, unless those of

us with full bellies and stocked refrigerators figure out how we are going to respond. This is going to be a real problem right there in Racine. I imagine some of our actual neighbors right here on Ohio St.

I'm so proud of all the ways Covenant already reaches out to provide food to so many people through the food pantry, Monday Night Meals, meals for Veterans, brown bag breakfasts, money we donate to places like HALO, and the Hospitality Center. And I also wonder how we might imagine new ways to provide for the basic needs of our neighbors. What kind of creative ideas do we have? How can we be even more generous? Where are there more opportunities to live out the words we pray and truly bring more of God's kingdom here on earth?

These are just some of the questions we can ask ourselves whenever we pray the Lord's prayer. This prayer is a gift from Jesus - words to pray when we don't have our own words, words to teach and remind us who our God really is. Each time we pray the Lord's prayer we are invited to know how deeply God cares for us - individually and together - from the big picture all the way to the most ordinary, daily parts of our lives. We are invited to have gratitude for the gift of today and to trust in God's daily provision, putting aside our fears about tomorrow and turning away from practices like hoarding in order to feel safe. And we are invited to remember that we do not pray alone. We are part of a people - God's people - who are called to be in relationship with each other and care about each other from the big picture down to the ordinary, daily parts of life. So, may this prayer be both a comfort and a nudge, an invitation and a reminder to you, of who God is and who we are called to be. Amen.