

“The World’s Greatest Prayer--Bread”

Today we’re continuing the series we started a couple weeks ago on the Lord’s Prayer. We’ve looked at how we can actually call it the Disciples’ prayer because this prayer was Jesus response to them asking him to teach them how to pray. We’re digging into this little prayer because it’s got some serious meat to it, some serious weight to it. And as we look at it we can become better prayers and more importantly we can have a deeper connection to God. In this prayer Jesus is teaching us the about God, about ourselves, about some important stuff. I made a guarantee as we started this series, that if you really engage this you’ll be a better pray-er and you’ll have a deeper connection to God. That’s what Jesus wanted when he taught this to his followers.

Jesus began this prayer by teaching who we’re praying to. Our Father, literally, our Dad—he’s that personal. Who is in the heavens—which is a way of saying that he’s all around us. Hallowed be your name—we’re to treat God as holy and revered. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven—we talked last week about what it would look like if up there came down here and how we’re called to take part in that project of bringing up there down here.

There are 6 small parts to this prayer and the first two deal with God, but the other four parts deal with us. They’re our requests of God, our needs, the places in our lives where we have needs that only God can fulfill.

So day we’re looking at the part of the prayer where Jesus teaches us to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.”

I don’t know about you, but just thinking about bread makes me hungry. I don’t know if that’s a universal thing or not, but there is something about bread, especially, fresh bread. The smell, the feel, the taste. One of my favorite places to go is to Panera Bread. I took my oldest daughter there almost every Friday morning before she started school and now I take our youngest daughter there almost every Friday morning. Walking through the door gives me a burst of joy because of the wonderful smell of fresh baked bread.

Bread has been called the staff of life. What does that mean? The word staff means a walking stick, a cane, something that supports you, that hold you up, that keeps you going. Bread, in all its forms around the word, keeps people nourished so that they can keep on going. Life itself is supported by bread.

Bread is a big deal in the Bible. It’s mentioned over 300 times and is symbolic of lots of different things. Unleavened bread is symbolic to the Jews for the time when they were released from slavery in Egypt and they didn’t have time to allow their bread to rise. As the Jews wandered in the wilderness for 40 years God sustained them fed them with Manna, bread from heaven—it was think flakes of stuff that they collected each day. Manna literally means, “What is it?” or “It is what it is.” It was God’s way of taking care of his people.

Bread is symbolic of thanksgiving and how God provides—bread was a regular sacrifice for the Jews. Each day Bread of the Presence was set out as a symbol of God’s presence, of how God had provided.

Jesus fed 5,000 people with 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish. That was simply a way to demonstrate God’s love. Jesus was accused of breaking bread with sinners and tax collectors. He ate with people who were considered to be unclean, outsiders, morally suspect. And the last night of Jesus’ life he broke bread with his disciples. We call it the Lord’s Supper. Jesus took bread and said, “This is my body, broken for you. Do this and remember me.” He wanted us to remember him not just when we take communion, but any time we ate at meal.

Bread was a big deal in ancient times and in the Bible, not just because it sustained life literally, but it symbolized so much more. Bread symbolized God’s presence. And in the Lord’s Prayer we pray, “**Give us this day our daily bread.**”

What are we asking for when we say these simple words? This really is a prayer of trust. We ask God to **give us**. How does God give us anything? What are we asking God to do when we ask him to give us something? Well, when we say “Give us this day our daily bread” we’re saying, “God we trust you.” When we say give us today our daily bread we realize that bread doesn’t just mean food, it means all of our needs—physical, spiritual, emotional, relational. Paul wrote, “**And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19, NIV).**

When we pray this prayer it’s an invitation to trust God for everything we need in our lives. Not to worry, not to be afraid, but to simply trust, ask and we will receive. Somehow, some way.

Now, sometimes that’s hard to believe when you’re going through tough stuff. It can be hard to trust in God. And most of us are really good at worrying. We worry about a lot of things. Any parents worried about your

kids? Are you worried about your health? About your marriage? Anybody worried about the economy? The stock market? The cost of groceries? Gas?

There is plenty to worry about, isn't there? So what do you turn to when you worry? Quite a few stock market analysts say when the economy starts hurting, put your money in what's called "sin stocks." Those are stocks in cigarettes, gambling and alcohol, because people tend to turn to those kinds of things when times get tough. There's your insider tip for the day! But surely there's a better way!

That's what Jesus is saying here. Whether life is good, or life is struggle, recession or no recession, pray this prayer and trust in the one who is worthy of that trust. "Give us this day our daily bread. God I don't know how exactly you're going to do it, but I'm going to trust you."

Jesus unpacks this later on in Matthew chapter 6. He says, "**Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?... So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well**" (Matthew 6:25-27, 31-33, NIV).

We can be expert worriers, but Jesus is saying, just trust. Somehow, someday God will provide.

But how does God give us our daily bread? How do we expect God to answer our prayers for anything? My experience is that God doesn't always answer our prayers like we want—instantly and magically. But is that how God works? We pray and poof! Food appears! We know it doesn't happen that way. How does God really answer our prayers and provide what we need?

About a year ago I started doing something regularly before I ate. As a family we pray before every meal, and I do the same when I eat by myself. But I've started to not only tell God that I'm thankful for my food, but I've also started visualizing all the people who took part in getting it in front of me to eat. Ever think about that? There are the farmers who plant the crops or raise the livestock. There are all the workers who harvest by hand, or run combines. There are the people who drive trucks delivering the produce from the field to packaging and distribution centers. There are all the other people in between—people who work in flour mills, or meat packing plants, and bakeries. There are those who load stuff into trucks, those who drive products to stores and restaurants. People who set the food out in the grocery store or prepare it in the restaurant. There are so many people involved in a simple meal at Del Rio, or that piece of broccoli in my salad at home, or that egg I eat at breakfast, that cup of coffee I enjoy. It's truly amazing when you think about it—how many people God used to answer the prayer for our daily bread. I try to pray for all those people who make it possible for me to eat that egg, that piece of broccoli—or that bag of chocolate (I'm not a complete health freak!)

But this road runs two ways. Not only do other people play a part in providing our daily bread, but we play a part in providing daily bread for others. And for some people, they're counting on you and me because they have no other source.

The last several months I feel like God has put something in front of me that disturbs me a lot. A number of world relief agencies say that there is a global food crisis happening. Because of drought in some areas, flooding in others, billions of bushels of corn turned into gasoline instead of being used for food, political unrest in so many countries, and a number of other factors, many of the poorest countries are seeing food shortages. Food shortages mean hunger, malnutrition, and disease. When I read about it, and see the pictures, my heart hurts. But my brain reels. I ask myself, "What can I possibly do? Anything I would do seems so small." This is where we become the answer to someone else's prayer.

One issue of *U.S. News and World Report* gives some suggestions for countries and for individuals. Things I can do, you can do: 1. **Donate money**—The United Methodist Church has one of the most widespread networks of support in the world and our giving supports the feeding of tens of thousands of people. Our giving supports the feeding center in village of Los Rosas in Nicaragua. 2. **Support food banks**—food banks locally and beyond are struggling to keep up, so connect with Crosslines, Salvation Army, etc. to get them food. You can always drop it off here and we will get it there. But what if each time we did our shopping, we bought extra for the food banks—that was just something we did. 3. Another idea is to simply **reduce food waste**. It's estimated that Americans waste about 100 billion pounds of food each year. Plan what you eat at home, and when you eat

out, so that perfectly good food doesn't go in the dumpster. 4. **Reward retailers that share profits with relief agencies—that takes a little research, but do the work.**

When we pray, "Give us this day **our** daily bread" we're also asking God to use us to provide food for those who need it most.

Every once in a while somebody will say, "If God is so good and so loving, then why do tens of thousands of people die every day from starvation?" My response is a question. Is there enough food on this planet to feed everyone? The answer is yes. The problem isn't with production, which is God's side, the problem is distribution, which is our side. God is counting on us to get food to those who need it. When the hungry pray, "God, give us this day our daily bread" God answers that prayer through you, and me. You become the answer to someone else's prayer. And not just for food, but for encouragement, for hope, for light.

That person at work who you can just see is down and discouraged, they've been praying, "God, help me, I feel so hopeless." Even if you don't like that person, what if you went to them and said, "I can see you're down, do you want to tell me about it?" That could be an answer to prayer for that person, a prayer for hope which is a form of daily bread.

Let's look at the next part of this phrase, when Jesus says, give us **this day**. He's teaching us to pray, "God give me just enough for today." The problem with us is that we want more than just enough for today. A lot more. We want enough for tomorrow, and the next day and through the next year. God is telling us here, "Sometimes it's not always helpful to have more than you need. Sometimes when you have more than you need, you think you don't need me anymore."

We can think, "I've got a good job, a great family, a retirement account, a nice home...I don't need God." We don't actually say that, but that's how we live our lives.

When the Jews were wandering through the wilderness and God provided manna for them, God said to them, "I'll provide you this bread from heaven, but only pick up enough for one day at a time." Of course some people tried to gather more than enough for one day and it went bad and filled with maggots. God said, "I want you to learn to trust me for each day to meet your needs." A man by the name of Agur said these words in the book of Proverbs: "**Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the LORD?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God**" (Proverbs 30:8-9, NIV).

Give us **this day** means, "Help me, Lord, to be satisfied with enough, and keep me from becoming obsessed with having more than enough. Protect me from obsessing on hoarding knowing that when I hoard, I'm not trusting in you, and I'm restricting my generosity to others."

Finally, Jesus tells us to pray, "Give us this day **our daily bread**." The word for "daily" here is the word *epiousios*. This is the only place in all of Greek literature that you find this word. Some scholars think that the disciples created a new word to express a new thought. It's two Greek words combined into one that means that which sustains your very existence. That which your existence stands upon. The staff of life. Your daily bread. And this is much more than food.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs says that we all have basic needs that have to be met before our higher needs can be addressed. Our basic needs are for food, water, clothing and shelter and security. But once you have those daily needs met, then you begin to address the higher level needs and the higher level needs, at least as Christians would talk about them, would be things like our need for unconditional love, our longing to connect to someone bigger than ourselves. A sense of purpose in our lives. We have these higher needs, or deeper hungers.

And how are those met? Jesus showed us: through a connection to the God who made us. He prayed, he knew God's word, he demonstrated God's love—that was his daily bread. When Jesus was tempted by the devil to turn rocks into bread and feed himself, Jesus said, "One does not live on bread alone, but by the word that proceeds from the mouth of God." Jesus had this connection through prayer, through scripture to be fed, to be connected. That's what sustained him in his call, in his mission, in his power to do what he had to do.

When he fed the crowds in John chapter 6, afterward he said to his disciples, "This was a sign. Do you understand? I fed these thousands with a few loaves of bread, with plenty left over, so you could get a glimpse of God." Then he said, "**I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty**" (John 6:35). I am the bread of life.

That's what Jesus is offering us. He is the one thing that can satisfy our deepest longings. That's what that song means, "This is my daily bread, your holy presence, living in me." Or the older song, "Fill my cup, Lord, I lift it up, Lord. Come and quench this thirsting of my soul. Bread of Heaven, feed me 'til I want no more. Fill my cup, fill it up, and make me whole." You are the bread of life.

Tom Brady is the quarterback for the New England Patriots. He's had an amazing career. Before age 30 he had won three Super Bowl rings. He's got it all at an early age. Money, fame, women, stuff. A few weeks before the Super Bowl last year did an interview on CBS. And in this interview he said some very honest things about his life.

"Why do I have three Super Bowl rings and still think there's something greater out there for me? I mean, maybe a lot of people would say, 'Hey man, this is what is.' I reached my goal, my dream, my life. I think, 'God, it's got to be more than this.' I mean this isn't, this can't be what it's all cracked up to be ... I love playing football and I love being quarterback for this team. But at the same time, I think there are a lot of other parts about me that I'm trying to find."

I don't know Tom Brady, but I know what he means, because I've been there, and maybe you have been too. What's he looking for? What else is there? Three Super Bowl rings, all the women you could want, all the dough you could want. Except a different kind of dough. A different kind of bread.

There are a lot of us who long for something more, even when we have so much. Not just athlete's who wonder if there's something more, or celebrities who are on the front page of the tabloids because their lives are a mess, again. I'm talking about us. Ordinary people. Ordinary people who wonder, "there's got to be something more." And the message for us from Jesus is, "There is somebody who loves you more than you could possibly believe or imagine, and there is a purpose for your life that goes beyond recognition, or money, or security, or whatever. And there is one who is going to stick with you no matter what. Whether you've got money or not, whether you've got looks or not. There's somebody who loved you before you were famous and will love you after you're famous. There's purpose for your life and there's hope." That's what we all need. That's our daily bread. That's what Jesus offers—himself.

I look around at our congregation and you know that you need more than you can just see and feel and touch. You know that there are higher level needs and that Jesus is the Bread of Life. But here's the problem with us, we seem to be malnourished sometimes. It seems to me that you plan on having one meal a week and think that's going to be enough to feed you. You come for a feast on Sundays and sing, and pray, and walk out and feel great. But then during the rest of the week, you eat garbage, some of the stuff you put in your mind and heart. Or maybe you just go without spiritual food for 6 days. You go 6 days without doing anything to feed your soul and you're going to find that your faith has no power, no energy.

And how do you eat the bread of life. In part by starting your day on your knees in prayer saying, "God walk with me today. Help me to live for you and honor you in all that I do." It happens when you see somebody at work who is struggling and you stop because Jesus is Lord in your life. You stop to love and encourage that person. You feel the Spirit welling up inside of you.

It happens when you carry God's word with you. Literally, get a pocket Bible and carry it and read a little when you get the chance. And carry that word also in your mind and think about it and draw from it. Have a plan. Say, "God teach me just one thing as I read your word today." You get spiritual food.

Or you use the weekly study guides. That's a meal, something to feed and nourish your soul. And as you wrap up your day before you go to sleep, you end your day on your knees again. You get honest with God, "I'm sorry about the ways I blew it today. So let's do it better tomorrow. I thank you for your love." You eat daily. Your daily bread. Your communion with God.

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread...." And for today that is the good news. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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