

Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread

Matthew 6:9-13

(Jesus said) “Pray then in this way: 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 forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.

In the Catechisms, Luther says, “Give us this day our daily bread. What is this? Answer – In fact, God gives daily bread without our prayer, even to all evil people, but we ask in this prayer that God causes us to recognize what our daily bread is and to receive it with thanksgiving. Than what does ‘daily bread’ mean? Answer – Everything included in the necessities and nourishment for our bodies, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, farm, fields, livestock, money, property, an upright spouse, upright children, upright members of the household, upright and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, decency, honor, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like. As we see, daily bread is more than just basic food. It involves all the basic needs for our body and our life here on earth.”¹ This may be the most difficult petition to pray in the entire Lord’s Prayer. By the time we get to this petition in the Lord’s Prayer, we should soon realize that not only grace and salvation are a free gift from God, our daily experience, and everything that we have is a free gift from God. This is a prayer that we center ourselves on the priorities of the Kingdom. This is a prayer that we properly use the gifts that God gives us, this is a prayer of equality.²

GIVE – We ask God to “give” us the things that we need. We don’t ask God to sell it to us, or lend it to us, or make us earn it, or take it from us when God thinks we are undeserving. We ask God to give it to us, at no cost to us, to have for our own, not because we have earned it, because we haven’t. To be able to keep when we are undeserving, because we are. We ask God to give it to us. But then why do we force others to act differently, for the same things? We expect people to “pay” for the gift in a variety of ways (usually by acting the way we think they should act). Or it is a conditional give on our part, because we expect something in return. We believe people should “earn” what they get. And we believe that we can determine who is deserving, and who isn’t. How we act with others usually indicates how we truly feel about God. Love God and love

¹ Book of Concord

² Mulholland, pages 69-87

your neighbor as yourself is the Great Commandment. Our actions show these relationships as the same. If we present a God that is judgmental, then we can be judgmental with our neighbors. If we are judgmental with our neighbors, and love is love; then aren't we saying God is judgmental. Our actions indicate our true beliefs much more than our words do. How would things be different if we acted with our neighbors the way God is truly with us; full of compassion, mercy, and unconditional love? What if we gave as God gives?

THIS DAY – We pray to God to give us “this day our daily bread.” We are called to only ask for what we need today. We quickly realize that this is a trust issue. We collect all the “life bread” we can, much more than we need for today. We hoard it, so others can't have their daily bread. We don't trust God. We don't trust that God will give us daily bread tomorrow. So we take all we can get today. We don't trust others. First, we don't trust that others won't take our daily bread today, leaving us with nothing, so we'd better plan ahead and take more than we need from them. We also don't trust that others will provide bread for us when we are in need. And we silently realize to ourselves – why should they, because we don't really give to them when they are in need. And lastly, we don't trust ourselves. We know we can't regulate ourselves. We refuse to participate in the spiritual discipline of fasting, of giving things up. How many of us actually fast? Today, we want to justify our desire to not participate in this spiritual discipline that we come up with creative things like.... “Don't take away, add to” beliefs that surround spiritual fasting today. We are just refusing to participate in the discipline God has given to us. We are called to only have today what we need for today. Immediately after the Lord's Prayer, Jesus says in Matthew 6:25-35, “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. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But 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? Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.”

DAILY BREAD – A more accurate translation of the word for “daily” is “sufficient or enough”. To pray for more than we need for right now is to be tempted into not trusting that God will provide for tomorrow, tomorrow. In our culture of over-consumption, we are praying for the strength to be able to say “God we have enough”, or “No, I don’t need more.” In the 4th Century, Gregory of Nissa noted that we should only be asking for the most basic needs – bread. We are not called to be asking for the extravagant here. We are not praying for the best, only enough.³ Proverbs 31:8 says, “Give me neither poverty nor riches, but feed me with the bread which is sufficient for me.” In Exodus 16:1-36, we see God provide “daily bread” for the people in the wilderness. God provides manna. They are to pick enough manna to eat for that day, and on the sixth day to pick for two days, because they cannot pick on the Sabbath. They are to take for that day and only that day. And if they try to take more, God will spoil it so that it cannot be eaten. The people are to trust that God will provide for them daily. How often do we use the phrase “saving for a rainy day?” This petition reminds us that we should save for today, and not some other day, rain or shine, that may or may not ever come. Truth is, every day is a Rain-y day for me and my house. Misfortune happens to those who want more than their daily bread, or fail to trust God.

US / OUR – I think this is the most difficult couple of words in the prayer for US to pray. Remember, this is a collective prayer. We pray “give US this day OUR daily bread.” We are not praying give ME today MY daily bread. But I think that is exactly what we mean. The image that comes to mind is that of Daffy Duck in the cartoon. He would find a treasure and run around grabbing everything, “MINE, MINE, MINE!” We really are only focused on taking care of ourselves. But the prayer is a collective, Give US OUR bread. The giving of daily bread is given to the community, not to the individual. That’s the way the system is supposed to work. Remember, these are Jesus’ words telling the community how they should be praying, in a kingdom sort of way. The way of the Kingdom is a collective, a community. The understanding is that there is enough in the community for everyone in the community to have what they need. I am to trust that God will provide dinner for me on Wednesday nights through this community. This is the lesson in Acts 2:43-47. Everything went into the pot, and the community dispersed as people needed. Everyone is quick to say that type of system doesn’t work. Why? Because greedy individuals don’t want to share. A little farther in the reading (Acts 5:1-11), Annanias and Sapphira hold back “just a little for themselves.” What does God do? Strikes them dead. We may be even worse than Annanias and Sapphira. They at least contributed most to the community and only held back a little. We typically give barely a little to the community, and hold back virtually everything. What should God do to us? In Cincinnati, two theologians have a movement called

³ Willimon/ Hauerwas, pages 70-77

“Abundant Community.” Their book is titled the same. And it is this same premise of community. God gives the community enough for all in the community to survive. Why it doesn’t happen is on the community. There is enough food literally right now to feed everyone right now, to our fill. We don’t have a food problem... we have distribution problem, we have a morality problem, we have a failing to share with our neighbor problem, we have a community problem; what we have is really a Kingdom problem. Look out how we collect for the hungry. We buy the cheap: tuna is cheap, spaghetti is cheap, processed food is cheap. And none of this is really nutritious. And that’s it. What if we were asked to buy what we actually eat; all the tasty, expensive stuff. Would we buy it, or complain about deserving? What if we held the hungry in a Kingdom sense, acting as if we believed the things we say about the Kingdom, and God. Hungry people walk by buildings filled with food. Thirsty people walk by places with lots to drink. Lots of strangers walking by places filled with Christians who claim to love everyone, and can’t find anyone to tell their stories. Lots of people who need clothes walking by homes filled with clothes that will never be worn again. Lots of people who are suffering in body, mind, and spirit, being passed by a lot of uncaring people who claim to care. Lots of people imprisoned by circumstances of life, walking by people who don’t even think they deserve proper respect. Lots of people walking by people who claim to know Jesus, but refuse to look at others.

We have a tendency to point at others, especially those in these vulnerable situations, and judge them because of their circumstance. In Matthew 7:1, Jesus says, “Judge not, lest you be judged.” The command is to not judge at all. Because if we do, we will be judged in return. Often, we think we could stand up to the judgement. But what is the judgment for us? Matthew 25:31-46 tells us how we will be judged at the end of this existence: by how we treated the hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, sick, or imprisoned. I was once at a meeting with five pastors, talking about the caring ministries in the town I was serving. The conversation centered on how we need to change the ways we care about the other in that town. The biblical foundation I gave for that discussion was this passage in Matthew 25. I think Jesus really means what he says in the Bible, especially here. And in Matthew 25, Jesus is talking about what the Kingdom is like (remembering the Kingdom is now). Jesus tells us that we will be judged, and gives us the criteria for judgment. I believe we will stand in judgment by how we feed the hungry, quench the thirsty, welcome the stranger, care for the suffering, and tend to those who are bound. I hope the Bible isn’t true in this case, because if it is, one of the things we should be hoarding is 200 SPF sunscreen. Because it is going to be very hot where we are going for a very, very, long, long time.⁴ And if God is

⁴ Mulholland, “Feed My Sheep”, pages 70-71

consistent, judgment will also be on the community, as a collective. And not the individual. I will be judged, and receive, based on what WE do.

Several years ago, I did an intense study, for myself, on Jesus and feeding the hungry. The miraculous feeding story is the only miracle recorded in all four Gospels. So it must be important. Mark found it so important that he tells it twice! In every occasion, Jesus says the same thing to his disciples, when they bring up the hungry people and what to do. Their solution is, “send them away”, “send them somewhere else”, “they can provide for themselves.” Jesus’ answer is, “You feed them.” That struck me. Jesus says YOU (my disciples) feed them. Figure it out. Get it done. This command of Jesus is why I served on the SOS Hunger Task Force for six (6) years. It is why the ELCA World Hunger Office made sure I became part of the MNYS Hunger task force as soon as I got to Staten Island, four years ago; long before I was ever officially a member of this Synod, which only happened a couple months ago. This is why I wore a kilt for a year, traveling the country, speaking about hunger, on my own free time and on my own dime. Because Jesus commands us to feed them.

There is no end to God’s abundance nor any limit to God’s generosity. “Give us this day our daily bread” is not only a reminder of the grace of our loving God who pours out upon us as individuals and as community, all that we need for support, sustenance, and thriving. It not only serves as a source and rationale for the outpouring of our heartfelt thankfulness and humble appreciation of God. This prayer also inspires, encourages, strengthens and enables us to be instruments of God’s generosity as we share all that we have been given so that others may come to know the steadfast love and gracious generosity of our Lord. We are called to live our lives appreciating what we have, every second we have it. We are called to have thankful hearts for all that we receive. We are called to be good stewards of what God has given us care over. The biblical witness to good stewardship is not about ourselves. It is about what is necessary for the betterment of the Kingdom of God. We are called to a life-long service for those in need of the basics of life. We are called to be willing witnesses to the miraculous in our lives. We are called to be companions for all that we encounter.⁵

Hold your nail. We are called to live in the Kingdom. We are called to trust that the Holy Trinity will provide for all our needs. And we are called to share everything we have, all the gifts the Triune God gives to us. And so we are called to pray... GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD.

⁵ David Westphal, “Thy Will Be Done”, p[ages 51-65

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