



Lord, Teach Us to Pray: “Our Daily Bread”
Luke 11:1-4
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First Presbyterian Church - Colorado Springs, CO
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Preface

This will now be the 3rd sermon in a series of sermons on prayer in Luke 11. For the first five of these sermons we are studying the Lord’s Prayer. The disciples wanted to know how to pray. They said, “Lord, Teach Us to Pray.” I find that request intriguing because they make no other requests to be taught. They do not ask to be taught to preach – or evangelize – or heal. They don’t ask how to become humble or servants. They do ask how to pray. I don’t fully know why they asked that – except that learning to pray must not be easy.

Yet, nothing is so important to learn. Corrie Ten Boom once said– “The devil smiles when we make plans. He laughs when we get too busy. But he trembles when we pray.” Jesus was delighted to teach a kind of outline for prayer – let’s hear it again. Today listen especially to the line – “Give us this day our daily bread.”

Introduction

Most of us have to learn the appropriate subject for our prayers. You may have heard the story about young Timmy and the troubles he felt on the subject of prayer. Timmy grew up Roman Catholic and after worship one Sunday we went to the chancel and laid a prayer request on the altar. It read, “Dear Jesus, I would really like a new bicycle. All my friends have one and I need one.” Signed - Timmy. The next Sunday, Timmy was back, apparently without a new bike. He left a second written prayer. It read, “Dear Jesus, you are slow in getting me a bike. I really need one soon. Please.” Signed - Timmy. On the 3rd Sunday there was a buzz around the church. It seemed that the statue of the Virgin Mary was gone. A note was left where the statue had been. It read, “Jesus, if you ever want to see your mother again, you had better get me a bike.” Signed, “You know who.” Ok – let’s agree that is not the way to pray.

1) What is this Daily Bread?

Certainly most of us know the need for our daily bread. Except for people following the Atkins diet – bread is a good thing. There is little that I love more than a loaf of delicious bread fresh out of the oven. Certainly the culture of the Middle East is quite oriented to bread – as is our culture. But not every culture thinks of bread as the staple of life.

The Lord's Prayer was translated into Vietnamese – "Give us this day our daily rice." Some likely pray for their "daily latte" – thinking that is a staple of life. From infancy on we needed daily nourishment. That nourishment first came from our mothers. And even in this more egalitarian era we still need the help of our mothers.

Is daily bread your prayer? Maybe it is not in a wealthy culture like ours. But there are some Christians around the world praying about daily bread every day. Eighty hundred and fifty million people go to bed hungry every night. Over 1.2 billion people live on less than a \$1 a day. Around the world, I have watched certain economically deprived people seriously pray for their daily bread. In agricultural societies so dependent upon rainfall and sunshine and safety, praying for daily bread is a serious petition in their lives.

The text we heard from Exodus 16 was about a desperate time. The people of God had left Egypt and were wandering in the wilderness. God provided for their need. He gave them a substance known as manna –we learned of that last summer. Manna is a nice word but simply means – "What is it?" It came every morning except on the Sabbath – and it came double the day before.

Jesus really does care about physical needs and the material world and daily bread. You might remember Eddie Rickenbacker's story from World War II. He had been a World War I pilot and quite famous. In World War II, he was asked to take a message to General McArthur in the Pacific. The B-17 in which he was flying had a faulty navigation system and went far off course and crash landed in the Pacific in October of 1942. He and his crew were adrift on rubber rafts for what turned out to be 24 days. One man had a New Testament and was reading it. That struck Eddie Rickenbacker, a devoted Christian, as a good idea. So each morning and evening they joined the rafts in a rough triangle, and in turn, the men read passages of Scripture and joined in the Lord's Prayer. When they crashed they had a 3 day supply of food and water. But it was quickly gone. Their prayers for sustenance grew more desperate each day. Some of the men became doubters when the prayers did not seem to be answered at once, but others persisted. Then deliverance came. On Day 8, when the men were starving, a seagull lit on Eddie's hat, and with care they captured it. Suddenly, they had their daily bread. They all ate some of it and used the rest for fishing bait. When they were dying of thirst, a passing shower drenched them. After 24 days of this dangerous existence, Navy Pilots rescued them near present day Samoa. No wonder their first act upon reaching shore was to kneel down and thank God for their deliverance. (Leonard Griffith, Barriers to Christian Belief, 116)

Yet, for most of the people in this room – starvation is not a real question. The question is where we will go for Mother's Day Brunch and what food we will choose. We live in a culture of relative abundance – lots of good choices. Today is a day mom doesn't have to cook – but we are in for more than daily bread. Maybe – because we don't have an empty hand we don't pray as naturally. This prayer is not a prayer for less than our daily bread, but perhaps it is a prayer for more than that.

Luther saw this "daily bread" as meaning all of the basic needs of our life. Listen to his catechism answer – daily bread is "everything that belongs to the support and wants of the body, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, field, cattle, money, goods, a pious spouse, pious children, pious servants, pious and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, discipline, honor, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like." (Luther, Smaller Catechism, 159)

Jesus will also tell us to cast our cares upon him for he cares about us. I think this petition in the prayer shows us that we can ask for our needs in this life. God is interested in our material world and what we need. Notice we are not encouraged to ask for our daily wants. To seek after God's will and kingdom living means we learn a new value system. We grow into deep contentment with what God gives, and with what God doesn't give. But Jesus does meet real needs. More than anything we need relationship with Jesus Christ.

2) “Our” Daily Bread

We are taught to pray for more than just us. “Our daily bread” means that we are remembering others as well. Our new Compassion child in Ecuador is named Evelyn Chimboreza. Some of you will remember that I went to Ecuador in January with a group of Presbyterian pastors. We toured the church where the Compassion project was hosted. I sat with her during lunch at the Compassion site. Each day the children receive a hot lunch as part of the program. After she had eaten about a third of her lunch, she put the remaining food in a little sack and put that in her backpack to take home for her little brothers and sisters. Her daily bread was to become daily bread for all.

I think this prayer stretches me to pray for someone else as well. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “If one member suffers, all suffer together.” (1 Cor. 12:26) I don’t want to just read of disasters in Myanmar and China, and not care. When the Holy Spirit comes upon us and leads us to live beyond our little will, then we learn to care about others. We learn generosity.

Marquis de Lafayette was a French general and politician who joined the American Revolution and became a friend of George Washington. An influential man in the United States and France, Lafayette was also a man of compassion. The harvest of 1783 was a poor one, but the manager of his estate had filled his barns with wheat. His manager said, “The bad harvest has raised the price of wheat. This is the time to sell.” Lafayette thought about the hungry peasants in the villages, and replied, “No, this is the time to give.”

3) Why pray for “daily” bread and not the five year plan?

There is something about this prayer that keeps us dependant. That is the request for the bread for the day – or one translation seems to suggest that this might be an evening prayer for bread for tomorrow. Nevertheless, there is something here that might make this prayer unusual for most of us gathered here – in that many of us are worried about having bread five years from now. We just want to make sure we will have enough when we retire or for a rainy day.

A woman tells of sitting down to dinner with some friends in their home and their little girl, Deborah, asked, “Daddy, why can’t we just pray once a week? Why do we have to ask for our daily bread every day?’ Her younger brother looked at her with the disgust which only a younger brother can show for an older sister, and said, “You don’t think we want stale bread, do you?”

Obviously there is something quite literal there. But I do think we are often closer to God when we are stretched. When things are fine and the future is bright then our hand is full, and we don’t need the faithful hand of God in the same way. Even spiritually we can grow less dependent upon the Holy Spirit as our lives settle down. Are some of us trying to live on stale bread - the bread of yesterday, or yesteryear? Jesus wants us to remain dependent on his daily provision.

Years ago I was at a conference where Ben Patterson spoke. Ben is a Presbyterian pastor who some years ago started a new church in Irvine, California. He worked very hard and ended up with two ruptured discs in his lower back. When the doctor ordered him to stay in bed for six weeks the only thing Ben could figure out to do to redeem the time was to pray. So for two and three hours every day he prayed. He went through the church directory praying for every member of the church by name. At the end of his recuperation period, Ben remembered thinking to himself - I wish I could keep doing this, keep praying like this, after I go back to work. In that moment he heard of voice of God speaking to him. Very distinctly God said, “You can, you dummy; trouble is when you’re well you think you’re in charge!” Sometimes it is good to be out of something – for then we have to ask for it.

4) Can I trust the good father with this?

Most who work in faith-based budgets and faith-based living do wonder. George Mueller is a rather famous 19th century Christian. He ran a remarkable orphanage simply on this prayer. In contrast to modern fund raising techniques, Mueller simply prayed that God would provide the daily bread for the hundreds that he fed daily. He did not write solicitation letters or have PR campaigns. He just prayed that God would provide and his writings are an amazing account of just how God did provide.

Cameron Townsend was the founder of Wycliff Bible Translators, a mission organization known over the world for going to unreached people groups and committing to writing down for the first time the language of people. They then translate the New Testament into this language and share Christ with the people. As a missionary, Uncle Cam, as he was called, knew what it was like to live in dependence on the Lord. He trusted God to meet his needs daily. Once he said, "Living from hand to mouth is not so bad when the hand is the hand of God."

Conclusion

Prayer really begins with one helpless hand and one hopeful hand. It begins with one empty hand and one trusting hand. We usually pray because we are missing something – that is the empty hand. We may need bread – or an answer – or peace – or healing. There may be a genuine fear of something rather dramatic and painful. These reasons cause us to pray in need. The other hand is the hand that trusts God and believes he has the answer. When we pray we have one fearful hand and one faithful God. Put those two hands together and we find the hand position for prayer that we teach children. A hand that recognizes need attaches to a hand that has supply and we pray. This is why God granted to us on Pentecost the gift of the Holy Spirit – to teach us to trust our good Father. And when we forget, the Holy Spirit reminds us to trust.

I think ideally we learn trust from the hands of our mothers who supply us early on. Eventually we learn that God is a parent far better than our own. Dare to trust God with your life.