

Sunday, February 13, 2022

Give Us Our Bread...

(Series: "Lord, Teach Us to Pray")
(Message Six)

Scripture:

*⁹ "This, then, is how you should pray:
'Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread..."
(Matthew 6:9-11)*

Message:

In 1923, six very successful men met in Chicago at the Edgewood Beach Hotel to talk business. They were Charles Schwab, President of the world's largest independent steel company (Bethlehem); Richard Whitney, President of the New York Stock Exchange; Albert Fall, the Secretary of the Interior; Jesse Livermore, the greatest securities and commodities broker on Wall Street; Leon Fraser, President of the International Bank; and Ivan Krueger, Chairman of the world's largest monopoly.

They knew how to make money; together they controlled more money than the United States Treasury. They had everything they wanted – at least you'd think so.

We have been studying the prayer Jesus taught his disciples to pray. This morning, we're focused on the fourth petition, "*Give us this day our bread.*"

Bread is the basic staple food throughout the world; everyone needs **bread**; no one can exist without it. It has both literal and symbolic implications. Bread represents our basic needs: we need to eat to survive; we need to eat daily to be healthy.

Yet, this seemingly simple petition has been a matter of controversy for centuries.

THE CONTROVERSY

The Greek word for “**daily**” (*epiousios*) is at the heart of this discussion. The word appears nowhere in the Greek language until **Matthew 6** and **Luke 11**.

You’ll remember Jesus spoke Aramaic; New Testament authors translated Jesus’ words into Greek, the universal language of the Roman world and our NT.

Epiousios probably doesn’t mean *daily*. *Epi* means *on, in, or to*; *ousios* means *essence, bring, or substance*; so, it would seem to mean “*that which is **essential***” or that “*which is **necessary** for us to be.*”

Origen, a Church leader and Greek scholar from the third century, wrote that he didn’t find this word in use among the Greeks, didn’t know exactly what it meant, and concluded it must have been created exclusively by the Gospel writers.

A word used once or twice gives the translator a real challenge; if Origen wasn’t sure back in the 3rd century, it’s even harder today.

In English, we usually pray, “*Give us this day our **daily** bread*” but it is redundant (“*this day*” is already clearly in the text) and it fails to capture the Greek meaning.

So, what do we do? The only plausible scenario is to examine how the word was used by preachers, commentators, and translators in the early church.

The early church fathers seem to have two basic **solutions** to this mystery and each *solution* contained two options or choices.

Solution One: Some early Christian fathers thought the word referred to **time**. Which raises the question, what kind of time? Some thought it meant, *today* (like we use in our English translation).

Others thought it referred to *tomorrow* - Jerome claimed in the *Gospel of the Nazarenes* [which we no longer have], the Hebrew word used meant, *tomorrow*. Some may say *Bread of Tomorrow* makes little sense because tomorrow never comes; tomorrow’s bread never actually comes either.

But for the Jews in Jesus’ day, this was a reference to the manna in the wilderness and it referred to “*the bread we will eat with Messiah in a promised great banquet of all believers at the end of history.*” Early Christians associated this “bread” with the bread of Communion.

Solution two: Others argued it was not about *time* but rather about the **amount**. So, how much bread? Some claimed it was asking for just enough to stay alive, i.e., the bread of subsistence. (Origen, the Greek scholar, preferred this understanding.)

Others, e.g., the Syriac Church, thought “*just enough to keep us alive*” was a bit harsh and preferred “*Give us today the bread that we need.*”

We now have four early church “solutions” - the bread of today, the bread of tomorrow, just enough bread to keep us alive, or all the bread we need. Which one? (This bit of conflict, as we learned last Sunday night, means our options include win [have it our way], lose [let the other person have their way], avoid [ignore the issue all together], compromise [everyone gives up something], or transcend. Let’s select the latter.) So, in trying our best to understand what Jesus was teaching, how about blending them? I.e., let’s discover if there is a common underlying understanding; something that would bring them all together? And where might we find it?

Kenneth Bailey and others are convinced this is the best approach.

And Bailey says the Old Syriac translation from the second century (the oldest and earliest translation we have from the Greek into any language) is very close to the Aramaic Jesus used (i.e., after Jesus taught this prayer in Aramaic, it was translated into Greek, and then translated back to Aramaic/Syriac.) The Syriac/Aramaic word used for *epiousian* is *ameno* (the root of our word, *amen*). It means, “*lasting, never-ceasing, never-ending, or perpetual.*”

And so, we pray, “*Give us this day our ameno bread - the bread that **doesn’t run out.***”

THE CONTEXT

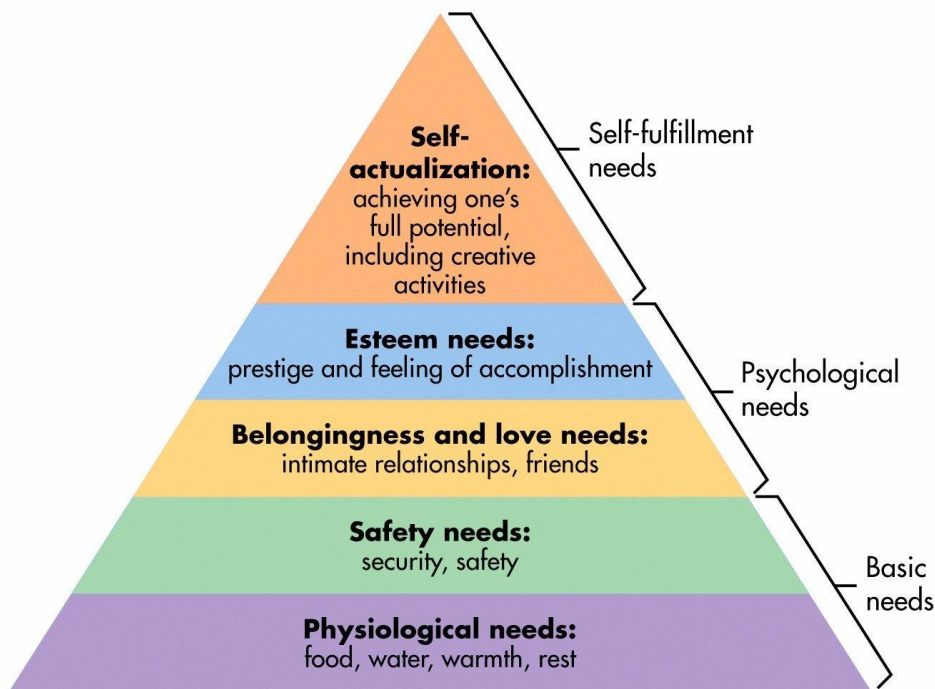
One of the most basic human fears is the dread of economic privation. Will I have enough? What about tomorrow? What if I lose my job? What if the kids get sick? What if I can’t work? How will we survive? This fear of not having **enough** to eat (or drink) is one of the deepest and most crippling fears we encounter – and it is everywhere.

The United States Department of Agriculture says over one-third of all Americans live below the poverty level (i.e., \$26,000 for a family of four) and are “food insecure” (i.e., they lack access to adequate supply of nutritious/healthy food).

In many schools across the country, a majority of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches because of their household income. And 3.1 million children under five years of age in our world die annually from malnutrition.

And so, we **worry**....and lay awake at night...what if that happens to me?

I think of Maslow’s “Hierarchy of Needs.” He says we are naturally motivated to first fill our **basic needs**: food, water, and air (i.e., *bread* in the literal, physical sense; we start at the bottom of the pyramid).



When those needs (at the bottom) are met, then we deal with our safety and security needs; then acceptance and love, then self-esteem (recognition, affirmation).

That is, if these basic needs are not met, we can't move *up* to **other things** like hallowing God's name, bringing in his Kingdom, ushering in his will on earth, forgiving (the next petition), resisting temptation, discipleship, witnessing, service, sacrificial giving.

This petition for the *bread-that-doesn't-run-out* is a prayer for **deliverance** from the angst (worry) that there won't be enough food, water, safety, or love for us. Talk to a low-income family or a retiree watching their few resources disappear; this fear destroys the human spirit and our sense of well-being; it betrays our humanness; it erodes any hope for the future.

So, we pray, "*Deliver us, O Lord, from the fear of not having enough to eat, give us bread for today, and with it the confidence that tomorrow we will have enough.*" Does this fourth petition include *bread* for today and for tomorrow? Absolutely! Are we asking for enough to keep us alive? Yes! And we are asking for all the bread we need to live!

But asking God for the bread-that-doesn't-run-out is just the beginning...

This petition's reference to "*this day*" brings to mind the experiences of the people of God in the **wilderness**. They had **nothing**; God **provided** them manna (and water).

God provided the *needed* amount each day – not so much that they could store it away, not too little so they went hungry, and twice as much pre-Sabbath.

The people of God must recognize God as THE provider and learn to **depend** on Him alone for their daily portion and provision (**Exodus 16:4-10**). They did, and they **never lacked** for food. This is something very challenging to us with our freezers, pantries, and local supermarkets full of food.

But this is what God desires: a person who is not only dependent on Him for all the basic needs that all people have, but a disciple who knows they're dependent, knows they need to trust God, and lives and prays like it all depends on God.

In praying this petition, our focus must be on “*this day*” – leaning on God every day for his provision and care throughout the day. Disciples of Jesus are **dependent** on God, so they need not be anxious; they **trust** He will provide, so they need not worry.

“Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, or what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more 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? Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?” (Matthew 6:25-26) (cf. Luke 12:22-24)

God wants us to depend on him to provide everything we need and not worry about tomorrow; praying this petition is an acknowledgement of and testimony to our dependence.

There is a Hebrew saying: “*He who has food in his basket today and says, ‘What shall I eat tomorrow?’ has little faith.*”

Trusting in God for our basic necessities allows us to trust God in the bigger issues of life as well; our dependence on God provides meaning and purpose.

“The pagans run after all these (basic) things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matthew 6:32-33)

With the basics taken care of, Jesus raises the bar: “*I have found food to eat that you don’t know about; my food is to do the will of him who sent me (i.e., Your will be done on earth) and complete his work (i.e., bring in the Kingdom).*” (cf. **John 4**)

When our basics are assured, we can embrace the mission of God to make his name **holy**, to bring in his **kingdom**, to do his **will** here on earth.

The Truth is...only Jesus can satisfy our needs; and so, we pray: “Give us the essential bread we need that doesn’t run out...”

THE CHALLENGE (Let’s dig a bit deeper into the treasures of this petition)

First, in this fourth petition, we are asking for **bread – not cake, i.e., not dessert.**

This petition wipes out **consumerism** and **materialism**; we’re not asking for *wants* or wealth; we are asking for what we *need* and committing to being content with that. This petition underscores again, it is not about me. We are asking only for that which sustains, not for all the extra benefits. It’s not only not about us, it’s also not about our kingdom, or our status on this earth.

When we petition God, we do not ask for wealth or prosperity, but rather for his assigned or determined **portion**, neither wealth nor poverty. Nor are we asking for bread for next year or for our retirement, but rather for “*this day*,” for our basic needs.

The author of **Proverbs (30:8)** writes: “*Give me neither poverty or riches, but give me only my daily bread.*” We’re talking about the basics. Not special treatment.

Second, in this petition we are asking for **our bread. Not **my** bread. (We’re talking about the pronouns again!)**

Mother Teresa, in *The Joy of Living*, tells the story of an elderly gentlemen who came to her and said a family with eight children had not eaten and asked if we could help. Mother Teresa took some rice and went there. The mother took the rice from me, divided it in two and left. I could see the faces of the children shining with hunger. When she came back, I asked her where she had gone. She gave me a simple answer: “They are hungry also.” The “they” was the family next door. I was not surprised that she gave; I was surprised she knew they were hungry. I did not have the courage to ask how long her family had been hungry; but I knew it had been a long time, and yet she knew, in her suffering, that next door they were also hungry.

That mother may not have known the Lord’s Prayer, but she knew there is not “my rice” – only “our” rice” and even though her children were hungry, **our** bread includes **our** responsibility to **our** neighbors. If it is **Our** Father, it must be **Our** Bread.

Those with **much** become the way **God** answers the prayers and **provides** for those who have **little**.

In **Deuteronomy 15:10** we read, “*Give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work...*” According to this verse, giving is not a suggestion, it is a

command. According to this verse and its context, everything we have, ultimately **belongs** to **God**. And God tells us, not only are we to be generous, but to do it with a **gracious**, unconditional **heart**.

The prophet **Isaiah (58:6-7)** writes, *“Is this not the kind of fasting I have chosen: to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter?”*

Jesus restates this verse in **Matthew 25:35** – *“For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat...”* and then says, *“From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded.”* (**Luke 12:48**).

So, when we, who have more than enough, pray *“Give us this day our daily bread,”* the emphasis must be on *us* and *our* (there is no *me* or *mine*.)” When we pray this petition, we **obligate** ourselves to **blessing** others so all may eat, and all may have their basic needs met so God’s Kingdom can come.

We do this when we contribute to *Hand2Hand*, sponsor a child through *World Vision* or *Compassion International*, *World Renew’s* food security fund, support *Streams of Hope*, fund a new water supply for Burundi; give to local benevolence and many other ways...

Third, in praying this petition, we acknowledge and affirm that bread, all bread, is a gift from God.

Bread is not a right; we have not created it. Such gifts are a trust from the one who gives them. All our possessions are on loan from their owner, the God who created it all; the God who holds us **accountable** for their care. We are to learn to hold them loosely; they are only on loan; one day it all goes back in the box because we can’t take any of it with us.

In his Gospel, John never mentions the Lord’s Supper, but he talks extensively about bread while sharing the story of the feeding of the 5,000. He quotes Jesus saying, *“I am the Bread of Life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry; whoever believes in me, will never thirst.”* (**John 6:35**)

Notice what Jesus is saying here: Jesus is saying, *“I am the real bread.”* Jesus is saying he is THE **essential** bread that satisfies our soul. Jesus is saying he is the bread that **never runs out**.

So “bread,” according to John, is a symbol of Christ’s presence and sacrifice; Jesus meets us in that breaking of bread; Jesus is the bread we need to survive.

With this petition, Jesus invited the physically hungry to **pray** for physical bread. He invites those who have bread to **share** their bread with those who lack. He invites all to **receive** the Gift that is essential to experiencing life in its fullness. In praying this petition, we are asking God to provide the bread that satisfies both our body and our soul.

Twenty-five years later in 1948, things had changed considerably for those “successful” businessmen: Charles Schwab lost everything in the stock market crash and died penniless; Richard Whitney was imprisoned for embezzlement; Albert Fall was imprisoned for bribery and pardoned so he could die at home; Jesse Livermore, Leon Fraser, and Ivar Kruger all committed suicide.

They knew how to make money, but they didn't know how to live or how to give; or how to pray this prayer. Don't make that mistake.

Only Jesus **satisfies**. Only Jesus provides **all** we need **all** the time.

Our Abba, Father, in the heavens,

Holy be your Name.

Let your Kingdom come,

Let your will be done...here on earth as it is in heaven...

Provide us with the essential bread we need that doesn't run out...

Amen