



Sermon, October 23, 2016
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Coburg and Junction City United Methodist Churches

The Prayer That Changes Us #8: "Give Us this Day Our Daily Bread"

Matthew 6:9-13 Good News Translation (GNT)

9 This, then, is how you should pray:

'Our Father in heaven: May your holy name be honored;

10 may your Kingdom come; may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

11 Give us today the food we need.[\[a\]](#)

12 Forgive us the wrongs we have done, as we forgive the wrongs that others have done to us.

13 Do not bring us to hard testing, but keep us safe from the Evil One.'[\[b\]](#)

Footnotes:

- a. [Matthew 6:11](#) we need; or for today, or for tomorrow.
- b. [Matthew 6:13](#) Some manuscripts add For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Opening

A sales representative from a major chicken producer is sent on a mission to the Vatican. He meets with the Pope: "Holy Father, my company would like to make a substantial donation to the Holy Mother Church - but there's only one condition...." "Yes, my son?" "We'd like you to authorize changing the Lord's Prayer from "Give us this day our daily bread to give us this day, our daily chicken." "I don't know my Son. Tradition and all, you know." "Well your Holiness, we are prepared to give you a Million dollars to do this." "I don't know my Son. Tradition and all, you know." So, the chicken man, hurries off for a quick phone call to his boss and he comes back. "Your Worship, I am authorized to go up to one Billion dollars if you change "Give us this day our daily bread, to give us this day our daily chicken." The Pope shrugs with a smile and says, "Well, now, my Son, give me a call tomorrow." Later that day the Pope has a big meeting with his Cardinals, Bishops, Priests. The whole Vatican family is there. He says to them, "Boys, I've got some a good news, and I've got some a bad news...." "The good news is that

"Give Us this Day Our Daily Bread"

the Holy Mother Church has come into one Billion dollars!!"

(CHEERING! APPLAUSE! BRAVO! BRAVO!!!) "Boys, the bad news is that we have lost the Wonderbread account!"

A Focused Life

We are now several weeks into this amazing prayer that Jesus left us. So far we have discovered that the prayer begins by centering our hearts and minds on God's presence. We call upon whatever it is that we hold to be the ultimate source of reality in the universe, and ask that it move into our lives, and set up housekeeping. We ask that this be true for the whole world as well. We seek to align our lives, our thoughts, our priorities with God. All of this is the focus of the first half of the prayer. All of this serves as a series of focusing lenses for our lives.

Have you ever been to an optometrist? If it is determined that you need glasses, the first thing to do is determine the exact correction in each eye so they can grind the lenses accordingly. So they have this large contraption that they place in front of your eyes. This contraption is equipped with a series of small lenses that the optometrist lines up in sequence until the written words come into the clearest focus. This prayer of Jesus functions this way. As we work our way through it, it is focusing our hearts and minds on what is truly necessary and central to life.

Jesus was all about teaching his followers about the focused life. Turn with me in your Bibles to **Luke 10:38-42:**

Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

“Give Us this Day Our Daily Bread”

Jesus is not saying that what Martha is doing is wrong, but her focus has become scattered and divided. For some reason, Mary has been able to settle herself down and focus. This prayer is about drawing our focus down onto the essentials of life, and the One who is the source of Life.

Gratitude for what we receive daily

So, having focused our minds onto the will of God being done in the world, Jesus has us request that our daily needs be met. “Give us this day our daily bread.” This is not a demand, nor is it the privileged whining that characterizes the wealthy and politically powerful in the world who look upon the resources of the earth as their entitlement. Rather this phrase is meant to cultivate a sense and practice of gratitude, of open-hearted receiving, not taking, of the abundance of the world, but tempering what we receive according only to what we actually need. The single most destructive attitude and behavior in the world today is greed. The avaricious lust after another country’s resources sends nations into war against other nations. The hungering after egregiously excessive profits and thus personal gain by high executives causes corporations to launder money, engage in illegal financial schemes, bypass regulations that protect the safety of workers and the health of the ecosystem. Paul, in his first letter to Timothy in the New Testament proclaims that “the love of money is the root of all evil.” Not money itself, but the covetous, lusty hankering after its accumulation at any cost. You cannot love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength if you devote that effort towards the accumulation of wealth. Asking only for our daily bread refocuses our attention to the gifts of God, and the society in which we live. It is the basis behind the saying, “Live simply, so others can simply live.”

Simplifying to what we truly need

If I was to rewrite this phrase, it might go something like this: “Simplify the desires of our hearts, by showing us what is truly needful for each day, and train us up to pursue that alone, and then stand ready to serve you and our neighbor.”

“Give Us this Day Our Daily Bread”

There is another time early in his ministry when Jesus talks about bread. In fact, the concern about bread and nourishment comes up even before he begins to preach or heal people. Do you remember where that is? It comes up when he is in the wilderness fasting and praying. The Tempter comes to him and tells him, as the Son of God, to ease his hunger by turning the stones into bread. Do you remember his reply? “Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” This reminds us to get things straight in our minds. The scramble and struggle for a daily living may be necessary, but only insofar as our true needs are met.

Ensuring that all have their daily needs met

There is another very important aspect to praying for our daily bread, and that working to ensure that everybody has access to their daily bread. We are also celebrating today as Bread for the World Sunday. Bread for the World got its start 36 years ago when 14 Catholic and Protestant leaders met in a church basement in Manhattan’s Lower East Side. Rev. Art Simon was then serving as pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church.

Simon recalls that the group “felt strongly that a void needed to be filled. Next to nothing was being done to challenge Christians to use their voices to end hunger.”

Like their father, Art Simon and his brother, the late Sen. Paul Simon, were committed to public service and social justice. Martin Simon spoke publicly against the World War II internment of Japanese Americans.

The poverty Rev. Simon saw as a pastor on New York’s Lower East Side also fed his determination to launch a citizens’ movement against hunger. The goal was straightforward: use the power of many voices to press elected leaders for solutions on hunger and poverty issues.

Bread for the World’s first Offering of Letters generated 100,000 letters seeking to persuade Congress to pass a Right to Food resolution. The resolution passed in 1975. From the beginning, Offerings of Letters

“Give Us this Day Our Daily Bread”

boosted the idea that citizen advocacy could move our nation’s leaders to act.

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As Simon explains in his forthcoming book, *The Rising of Bread for the World*, “My experience is one I have heard Bread members from all over the world express again and again: ‘God laid the suffering of hungry people on my heart and called me to do something about it.’”

He says that Christians must see that using their influence as citizens to overcome hunger is an urgently needed expression of faith and love. The ability to do so “is a gift from God, and a powerful way to help folks who are hurting.” (<http://www.bread.org/about-us/our-members/art-simon.html>)

Closing

I’d like to close with a story that Paul Harvey told once about “The Old Man and the Gulls.” It is gratitude that prompted an old man to visit an old broken pier on the eastern seacoast of Florida. Every Friday night, until his death in 1973, he would return, walking slowly and slightly stooped with a large bucket of shrimp. The sea gulls would flock to this old man, and he would feed them from his bucket. Many years before, in October, 1942, Captain Eddie Rickenbacker was on a mission in a B-17 to deliver an important message to General Douglas MacArthur in New Guinea. But there was an unexpected detour which would hurl Captain Eddie into the most harrowing adventure of his life. Somewhere over the South Pacific the Flying Fortress became lost beyond the reach of radio. Fuel ran dangerously low, so the men ditched their plane in the ocean...For nearly a month Captain Eddie and his companions would fight the water, and the weather, and the scorching sun. They spent many sleepless nights recoiling as giant sharks rammed their rafts. The largest raft was nine by five. The biggest shark...ten feet long.

But of all their enemies at sea, one proved most formidable: starvation. Eight days out, their rations were long gone or destroyed by the salt water. It would take a miracle to sustain them. And a miracle occurred. In

"Give Us this Day Our Daily Bread"

Captain Eddie's own words, "Cherry," that was the B-17 pilot, Captain William Cherry, "read the service that afternoon, and we finished with a prayer for deliverance and a hymn of praise. There was some talk, but it tapered off in the oppressive heat. With my hat pulled down over my eyes to keep out some of the glare, I dozed off." Now this is still Captain Rickenbacker talking..."Something landed on my head. I knew that it was a sea gull. I don't know how I knew, I just knew. Everyone else knew too. No one said a word, but peering out from under my hat brim without moving my head, I could see the expression on their faces. They were staring at that gull.

The gull meant food...if I could catch it." And the rest, as they say, is history. Captain Eddie caught the gull. Its flesh was eaten. Its intestines were used for bait to catch fish. The survivors were sustained and their hopes renewed because a lone sea gull, uncharacteristically hundreds of miles from land, offered itself as a sacrifice. You know that Captain Eddie made it.

And now you also know...that he never forgot. Because every Friday evening, about sunset...on a lonely stretch along the eastern Florida seacoast...you could see an old man walking...white-haired, bushy-eyebrowed, slightly bent. His bucket filled with shrimp was to feed the gulls...to remember that one which, on a day long past, gave itself without a struggle...like manna in the wilderness.

Paul Harvey's *The Rest of the Story* "The Old Man and the Gulls" 1977, quoted in Knofel Stanton, Heaven Bound Living, Standard, 1989, p. 79-80.

As God has provided for your daily needs, learn gratitude from Captain Eddie Rickenbacker. Do what you can to see that the needs of other are met as well.