

The Lord's Prayer: Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread
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First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha
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Psalm 63:1-8

¹ O God, you are my God, I seek you,
my soul thirsts for you;
my flesh faints for you,
as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.
² So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary,
beholding your power and glory.
³ Because your steadfast love is better than life,
my lips will praise you.
⁴ So I will bless you as long as I live;
I will lift up my hands and call on your name.
⁵ My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast,
and my mouth praises you with joyful lips
⁶ when I think of you on my bed,
and meditate on you in the watches of the night;
⁷ for you have been my help,
and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy.
⁸ My soul clings to you;
your right hand upholds me.

Matthew 6:9-13 Young's Literal Translation

⁹ thus therefore pray ye: `Our Father who [art] in the heavens! hallowed be Thy name.
¹⁰ `Thy reign come: Thy will come to pass, as in heaven also on the earth.
¹¹ `Our appointed bread give us to-day.
¹² `And forgive us our debts, as also we forgive our debtors.
¹³ `And mayest Thou not lead us to temptation, but deliver us from the evil, because Thine is the reign,
and the power, and the glory -- to the ages. Amen.

Before this study of the Lord's Prayer, it had never occurred to me that this prayer is not only about God but also about what it means to be in community. We began with "**Our** Father" and now we come to "Give **us** this day **our** daily bread." Soon we'll say "Forgive **us our** debts as **we** forgive **our** debtors" and "Lead **us** not into temptation" and "Deliver **us** from evil." There is nothing singular about this prayer. If we were ever to forget that our faith is meant to be lived in community, this prayer reminds us. In community, we support one another. In community, we guide one another. In community, we grow together. In community, we challenge one another. In community, sometimes we frustrate one another, sometimes we disagree with one another but, because we are community, we work it out, we do the hard work of forgiving and making peace. While we can certainly connect with God

alone and away from the church, we cannot live as the community Christ calls us to be without the church.

If I am paying attention when I pray this prayer, I realize that saying “give us this day our daily bread” is a prayer that hunger would cease. Give us, all of your children, all over the world, enough to eat each day, I pray. Not “enough” in the sense of keep-us-from-dying-one-more-day – “enough” as to be satisfied, nourished. We think back to the story in Exodus of the Israelites in the desert who were hungry and crying out to Moses that they were better off in Egypt than starving in the desert. God sent them manna and Moses commanded them to “Gather as much of it as each of you needs” and “Morning by morning they gathered it, as much as needed; but when the sun grew hot, it melted.”¹ Everyone had their share, and did not lack, and no one could hoard more for themselves for what was left out melted and what they tried to keep in secret went bad overnight. Give us this day our daily bread, enough for ourselves and for our brothers and sisters.

One of the evening group activities on our mission trip was a visit to Feed My Starving Children (FMSC). At all FMSC locations, volunteers come to pack a combination of vitamins, vegetables, protein, and rice in bags called Manna Packs, which are shipped and distributed free of charge to starving peoples around the world. The night we went, we packed bags to go to El Salvador and, as part of our orientation, we saw what the alternative was for the people who received these Manna Packs. Mothers would make cakes out of mud, dry them in the sun, and then feed them to their children so their bellies would be full at night. “Enough” to keep them from dying, not “enough” for them to be satisfied, certainly not nourished. We were able to see photos of kids who flourished once they began receiving enough – the transformation was startling. Startling to see 17-pound eight-year-olds with wispy, fine hair on their heads. Startling to see those same children with full cheeks and full heads of hair and full smiles just a couple of months after being nourished daily. We packed 9,720 meals in our hour’s work, an amount which will feed 27 kids for a year, will give them enough. The experience moved us and we want to share it with you; there’s an FMSC location in Libertyville, Illinois, so we’ll be arranging a date in the fall for us to go as a church family, as community. Give these children their daily bread, O God, we pray.

Praying this sentence as a prayer against hunger is powerful. I suspect you realize, though, that this prayer is much more than that. We may think of “give” as a demanding word, almost a word of ingratitude. Hear it, though, as a word which confesses that we cannot do this on our own, a word which confesses that we rely on God, a word which relinquishes our sense of control. We need from you, O God, what is necessary to survive so we pray you will give it to us.

¹ Exodus 16:16 & 21.

And then we pray that God give it to us “this day,” give us our “daily bread.” This prayer is not a worrier’s prayer for we are not asking about yesterday or fretting about tomorrow. We vow to be present in this day. One of my favorite, although not remembered-often-enough, reminders from Christ is this one from Matthew: “And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?”² I am not praying “Give us this day our bread for the 2013-2014 school year” or “Give us this day our bread for Advent.” I am praying here and now for the here-and-now, for God will take care of the rest. Today, God, I will rely on you and focus on this day for it is right in front of me; I won’t miss it dwelling in the past or imagining the future. This is not an easy prayer for me. I have hope that the more I pray it, the more I live it.

Yet another way to understand this prayer is with an eye on the gospels. We read that when Christ was tempted in the wilderness, “The tempter came and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.’ But he answered, ‘It is written, “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”’”³ And we read in the gospel of John, “Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.’”⁴ Give us this day our daily bread, O Lord. Give us your Word through your Son. We need material bread AND we need spiritual bread, the kind that is found in reading the Bible, in worshipping God, in daily prayer, in living lives of service.

And, with a table spread before us, we are given daily bread of yet another kind – this bread of communion is but a foretaste of the heavenly banquet God is preparing for us all. We are especially conscious of this in October on World Communion Sunday but the truth is, when we come together around the communion table as a community of faith today, our community is not the size of First Presbyterian Church. People of all nations and races join together in communion through Christ, and because of Christ, to share our daily bread together. Give **us** this day our daily bread.

Today, this prayer is enough. So let us pray: Our Father, help us be the means that no one should be hungry and all should have enough. Our Father, we need from you everything to survive. Our Father, we are present today. Our Father, make us to receive your Word today. Our Father, help us to remember that we are a community knit together by you and for you. All this we pray through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

² Matthew 6:27.

³ Matthew 4:3-4.

⁴ John 6:35.