



LIVING WORD EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Evangelical • Reformed • Catholic

Give Us This Day

St. Matthew 6:11

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December 7, 2008 – Advent 2

In the last three weeks we've looked at the first three petitions in the Lord's Prayer and we've seen that one of the great lessons we need to learn about prayer is that we always need to put God's interests first. Before we focus on ourselves and on our needs, we first honour God's name, we first submit ourselves to his sovereignty, and we humbly subvert our own will to his. And this is why it's so important that we fuel our prayers with Scripture, because it's in the Bible that God reveals himself. It's in the Bible that God shows us his way and his will. It's in the Bible that God tells us the story of his redemptive acts. It's in the Bible that God gives us his message of the Gospel – the Good News of Jesus Christ. Our prayer and our worship should be like a flame. The Holy Spirit is the spark – the match – that ignites the flame, but it's Holy Scripture that kindles the fire. If you don't have the kindling, it's awfully hard to get the fire going, but at the same time, if you do get the fire going and don't keep it fed with the kindling of Scripture, it can easily find fuel somewhere else – from the world, from the flesh, and can burn out of control and become a destroyer instead of the heat and light of the Gospel that others should see in us.

It's only after we've put God first that we approach him with our own interests – our families, our friends, our relatives, our work and our finances, our health problems and all those other things. That's not to say that our own needs and concerns aren't important though. Scripture does tell us to pray for them. We just need to make sure our perspective is right. Jesus tells us that it's *after* God's name, God's kingdom, and God's will that we pray:

Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. (Matthew 6:10-13)

Our needs: daily sustenance, forgiveness of our sins, and spiritual victory. All of our *needs* are covered in those three short petitions. Our whole life is right here. Jesus is so amazingly good at distilling everything down to what's important and putting things in perspective. There's nothing we need that isn't covered by these three petitions.

I want to look this week at the first of these three petitions: "Give us this day our daily bread." That first prayer request deals with our physical needs. When Jesus says "daily bread" he's talking about all the needs we have for making it day to day. It's a prayer not just for food, but for clothing to keep us warm and dry, for a roof over our head, and for a job that will provide the means for us to care of ourselves and our families. I think the list could go on – it covers all those things that we *need* in order to live in this world. But it also needs to be said what this is *not* a prayer for. Jesus says, "Give us this day our daily bread," *not*, "Give us this day a new BMW," or "Give us this day a big fancy house," or even, "Give us this day a big healthy bank account." The rest of the New Testament reinforces what Jesus has in mind. St. Paul writes in Philippians 4:19:

And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

Paul *doesn't* say God will supply all of your *wants*. It's not to say that God won't often supply our needs in style. He does seem, especially in the western world, to allow us a lot of luxuries, but those luxuries are often the first cause of our spiritual poverty. But we are never told to ask for those things. We're only told to ask for the *necessities* of life. God may bless you with a fancy new car, but it's far more likely that he's going to provide for your needs by keep your twenty-something-year-old Honda running. Remember what I said at the end of last Sunday's sermon? John Calvin wrote, "Love God, and do what pleases you." I think we could apply that same principle here: "Love God, and pray for what you need in order to carry out what pleases you." But the key is that if you are truly following God and if your will is in line with his, your desires will be for your needs to be met so that you can do the work of his kingdom. His kingdom come! His will be done!

Jesus tells us to pray for our daily needs because God has promised to give us the things we ask for. A master provides for his slaves. A general meets the needs of his soldiers. A father makes sure to provide for the needs of his sons and daughters. The master, the general, and the father are all willing and want to provide. And in the same way our Father cares for those who have become his children through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Maybe we sometimes doubt that God will answer our prayers for the needs of life, but we shouldn't. Jesus himself teaches us that God is willing. He tells us to pray it here, and in the next chapter of Matthew's Gospel he tells us why. Look at Matthew 7:7-11:

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

Jesus tells us three things here: First, we come before God as his children. We must be his children before we can come to him. Remember that he tells us to pray, "Our Father in heaven." Again, prayer is for Christians and Christians alone. Second, as God's children we are invited and *even* urged to come. Prayer isn't something we *can* do. It's something we're *expected* to do. I think we too often tend to look at it as something we *have* to do – like a chore – instead of as something that's a privilege. God *invites* us. And third, God delights to answer those who come before him. We come into the Father's presence through the Lord Jesus Christ and led by his Holy Spirit. And when we come that way we come not as God's enemies, but as his children. We're family.

Think about it. There are lots of things an earthy father would never do for a stranger. There are even more things he'd never do for an enemy. But there's almost nothing a loving father wouldn't do for his sons and daughters. And in the same way, we come not to a God who is distant, and

harsh, and stingy or who is begrudging and tight-fisted with his gifts. We come to a God who is loving, willing, and merciful, and who is actually *anxious* (if we can use that word of God at all) to be known and loved by his children. Our God is a God who *urges* us to come and who *wants* us to come!

And he doesn't want us coming every once in a while like a son or daughter who comes home every year at Christmas to visit their father. Notice how Jesus tells us to pray, "Give us *this day* our *daily* bread." "Give us *today* our *daily* bread." Think about this. Do you notice how Jesus suggests there that this needs to be a regular and repeated prayer? A daily prayer? "Give us *today* our bread for *today*. He repeats that same idea twice – and he does that in a prayer that in whole totals only sixty-five words. If he's being that tight with words and chooses to repeat himself, it's probably because it's important.

The word that's used by St. Matthew for "daily" when he says "daily bread" is a Greek word that isn't used anywhere else in the Bible and until fairly recently no one had ever found it used in any other ancient writings. No one was sure exactly how to translate it – so we just followed the tradition of the ancient translators who said it meant "daily." That was confirmed in the last century when archaeologists found ancient paper fragments in Pompeii and an ancient papyrus in Egypt that used this word and confirmed what it means. And you know what those ancient fragments were? They were basically ancient shopping lists and the word referred to a daily ration. Jesus tells us to pray each day for a daily ration of life's necessities.

So what do we do with this? Well, when we see that Jesus is giving us a simple prayer for the things we need in life and that God invites us to pray this way, we should see three great truths here.

First, Jesus reminds us that God cares for our bodies – for our physical well-being. There have always been people in the church that taught that the body was bad and that only our souls are important or good. That's where the idea of celibacy as preferable to marriage came from. That's where the idea of hair shirts and sleeping in the cold without a blanket came from.

Some have even outright abused their bodies – beating themselves and mutilating themselves thinking that their bodies were evil. But that's just not biblical. Even if we are fallen and sinful, we still bear the image of God. And think about the fact that Jesus spent so much of his time healing diseases and satisfying real, bodily hunger. When the crowd followed him into the wilderness to hear him preach, he was concerned that they have some food to eat – and he performed a miracle to feed them. Jesus himself, in coming to redeem us, took a body just like ours. He didn't come just to save souls, but came to save body, mind, and spirit.

Now we have to be careful. There are plenty of preachers out there picking people's pockets saying that God's will is for everyone to be fully healthy and that if you suffer from sickness or disability it's because you don't have enough faith in God's promise. The "faith" teachers on TV preach this. And yet consider that even these guys get old and die – a lot of them from heart disease, strokes, and cancer. Disease is part of our fallen state. God's will is first and foremost for the health of your soul. If healing your body gets in the way of the health of your soul, it's probably not God's will that you be healed! We have to be careful with this stuff.

Second, Jesus teaches us here that if we live as God intends for us to live, we need to live one day at a time. That means that we shouldn't be anxious about the unknown future and we shouldn't get stressed out about it. We need to live in a moment-by-moment dependence on God.

That said, I think it's important to note that the way we live this out is going to be different from culture to culture. Jesus' point is that we shouldn't be worrying about tomorrow and that we ask God and depend on him for what we need today. This plays out differently in a culture where future needs are met through the family structure and a culture where we meet future needs through financial planning and saving. In our society it would be wrong for a father to neglect to save for his children's education or his retirement on the belief that he should ask God only for one day's ration at a time. In the world we live in, part of today's ration is the money that we set aside for tomorrow. For that reason we shouldn't

neglect our families by neglecting insurance policies, pension plans, or savings accounts. To do that would be to misread what Jesus is saying here. But at the same time, we shouldn't become wrapped up in these things as if our life and our future ultimately depend on them. We need to wrap ourselves in our confidence in God!

Think about it. As a Christian, have you ever known God to be unfaithful to you? Have you lacked the *necessities* of life? There are plenty of times that God deprives us of our *wants* – usually because we need to get our focus back on him. God is always faithful. We can trust him to provide today and we can trust him to provide tomorrow.

Finally, third, we need to feed spiritually on God. Jesus isn't just telling us to look to him for our physical needs. There's only one other place in the New Testament where people make this request, "give us bread." It's in the middle of Jesus' sermon on the spiritual bread that St. John records in chapter six of his Gospel. Jesus said to the people listening to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.' They said to him, 'Sir, give us this bread always.' Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst'" (John 6:32-35). Just like the woman of Samaria who met Jesus at the well was thinking of physical water when Jesus talked about giving her a drink, these Jews were thinking about physical bread. But Jesus tuned them away from these physical things and turned them to himself as the One who could satisfy the far greater hunger of their souls.

What does it mean to feed spiritually on the Lord Jesus Christ? It means that he becomes the source of all spiritual life and that we will grow spiritually only as we draw close to him and learn about him. *Dear friends, you need to understand that if you don't do this – if you don't draw near to Christ and draw your strength from him daily – you will starve spiritually.*

It's true, but very tragic that so many Christian let *things* get between themselves and Jesus and end up going hungry. This is what God tells us happened over and over again in the Old Testament. Scripture tells us that the Israelites desired "things" instead of God. The scary part is that God gave them those "things," but also allowed their souls to starve (Psalm 106:15). We do the same thing today. One of our hymns describes our situation very well – we're "rich in things, but poor in soul." We're often just like the Israelites, getting distracted by the world. And God lets us starve spiritually. We use every opportunity and every means to satisfying our physical hunger, and yet we never look to God for spiritual food. We pray, "Give me my physical bread," but we never pray, "Give me that spiritual bread that comes down from heaven."

I've seen first hand how God uses these principles to draw us closer to himself. Back in the late 1970's and early 1980's my parents were attending Bible school. For part of that time our family lived off of the proceeds from the sale of our house. When that was all gone, my dad started working part time, but the economy was bad and every place he got a job at either went out of business or let him go not long after he was hired. We were truly living from day to day at that point. It was during that time that a neighbour came by the house and asked if we'd be interested in taking in two canaries that she had to get rid of. The fact was that we didn't have the money to take care of those two birds, but my parents said yes and took them in as a reminder that if God would care for the birds, he would care for us too. Every time the pantry was empty, he provided. I remember at the worst of it, we were sitting down on a Sunday after church to eat the last thing in the house: boiled millet with some pancake syrup on top, when friends came by with bags full of groceries. God let us get all the way down to empty, but he did it to show us that it was his provision that got us through.

But our *physical* care wasn't really the point. And it never is. God provides for our physical needs so that we'll learn to trust him with our spiritual needs. Jesus healed the paralytic not just to heal him, but to demonstrate that when he says he has the power to forgive sins, he really

does. He wanted to show to show those people that he really was the God he claimed to be. And he does the same for us as he gives us our daily bread – sometimes in miraculous ways.

But that's not the only way he gets our attention. In Portland I had the privilege through our parish of working with ministry shares the Gospel with people in the homosexual community and disciples them, helping them come out of that lifestyle. And I remember talking one day with one of the men there. We were talking about when he had become a Christian. And he shared with me that when he became a Christian, his one great desire was that God would take away his homosexual feelings. But he said that didn't happen. But he also said that as months went by he realized that God had left the temptation there to teach him something more important: that he needed to lean daily – constantly – on Jesus Christ. He needed the constant reminder that he could never live his life spiritually victorious without relying on the Saviour to give him power over sin. And that really struck me. I had to ask myself how much of the time I struggle with sin on my own simply because I fail to lean on Jesus Christ daily. How often do I come to his Table to receive the outward signs and symbols of the sustenance he gives to me, but live the rest of the week almost completely ignoring the fact that he is with me as the bread of life to spur me on to spiritual victory.

So as we gather at his Table today, remember that your heavenly Father *desires* for you to come into his presence each day. He invites you to give him honour and glory and that he delights to show his glory by giving you those things you need to make it through this day – not just your food, clothing, and shelter, but his grace and the indwelling of his Spirit to give you new life and victory over sin.

Please pray with me: Our Father in heaven, you tell us to first pray that your name would be hallowed – honoured – in our lives, by what we say and by what we do. Remind us also that you are honoured and glorified as you bring your promises to pass for us – as you care for us the way you have promised. Reminds us to daily come before your throne to seek our daily ration of bread, trusting in you to provide, but not only that, Father; let your

provision of our daily bread be a reminder to us that we also need to come to you for our daily ration of grace – that we find no spiritual health and no spiritual victory in and of ourselves, but that we find it only in your grace and through the Cross of Jesus Christ. We ask this in his name. Amen.