

First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham  
“Praying Like Jesus: Give Us Our Daily Bread”  
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July 1, 2018

Exodus 16:1-8; Matthew 6:9-13

What in the world does this part of the prayer have to do with us? While the other parts of the prayer appear to have some direct connection to us, this one seems a bit irrelevant to our daily lives. How so? Well, I hope to show why with one of my famous Sunday morning surveys. So here goes. How many of you have a refrigerator? How many of you have food in it? How many of you have a freezer of some kind? How many of you have food in it? How many of you have a pantry? How many of you have food in it? How many of you know where the closest grocery store is? How many of you have been there in the last week or so? How many of you have been out to dinner, or ordered in, in the last two weeks? My point of all this is that for the vast majority of us here this morning, we have “bread” and enough to spare. We don’t have to worry about our next meal. So why then ought we to include this part of the prayer when we pray each Sunday? The answer can be found in an Old Testament story, a New Testament story and a couple of pronouns. So here we go.

First, we have the Old Testament story. Jesus was teaching to Jews who knew their history and the stories of the ancestors. One of those stories was of the great Exodus, which undergirds much of this prayer. In the Exodus story, after the people have left Egypt and entered the wilderness, they ran out of food and began to complain. They whined that Moses has led them into the wilderness to starve to death. They whined that it would have been better for them to have remained in Egypt as slaves, because at least there was something to eat. To deal with this situation, Moses prays to God, and God decides to give the people food, in the form of manna, a bread like flower. The catch however, was that there would only be enough given for one day at a time, except on the day before the Sabbath when there would be enough for two days so that the people did not have to work in gathering it. And if people tried to store it, or save it, the manna would go bad. Therefore, they were given their, wait for it, daily bread. Thus, when Jesus teaches the people to pray, give us this day our daily bread, he is drawing upon a mighty act of God in which God feeds the people. Thus, the prayer is rooted in a trust of God that God can and will feed.

Second is the Jesus’ story. This is the story of the feeding of the 5,000, the only story which is in all four gospels. In this story Jesus has been teaching the people, just as Moses taught the people. The people are in a place where there is not food, just like in the Moses’ story. This time however, there is no manna that suddenly appears. Instead Jesus asks the disciples if they have any food. They have seven loaves and few fish; hardly enough to feed

themselves, much less a large crowd. Jesus, however, declares that the supplies are adequate. They give him the bread and fish, he blesses them and those few provisions provide enough so that not only are all fed, but there are leftovers. It is the disciples who provide the daily bread. It is the disciples who are God's agents of fulfilling the prayer, give us this day our daily bread. And this leads us to our pronouns.

The two pronouns are "us" and "our". Note that Jesus does not teach people to pray, give me this day my daily bread. Jesus teaches the people to pray give us this day our daily bread. This is a community prayer. It is a prayer that reaches back into the depth of the Law of Moses and reminds people that God called together a community and not a bunch of independent, self-actualized, followers; and that God uses the community to be the agents of delivery for daily bread. He is teaching the crowd to care for, and share with, one another. What this means for us is that we are the "us" and the "our." We are the disciples. We are part of the community that God has created that prays the prayer together and not apart. We are those who hold the seven loaves and a few fish. We are those who are to share and trust that God is going to multiply this food.

This understanding becomes even more clear when you look at the order of the prayer. Just prior to this request, we are called upon to pray that God's kingdom comes, the kingdom in which all will have enough, and that God's will, will be done; God's will that all is shared and no one goes without. Only after those two requests do we come to the plural pronouns of our daily bread. For us then we need to place this prayer into the context of our modern world, which in some ways mirrors that of Jesus' day. We live in a world in which there are millions of people here in the United States and around the world who do not have daily bread; who do not know where their next meal is coming from. We live in a nation and world in which many are being left behind and are not given the tools or the opportunity to earn their daily bread. What this part of the prayer is calling us to do is to see all those people as "us" and that we are praying that God will use us to ensure that all of us have enough.

The gift of God to most of us, most of us who have enough in our fridges, freezers and pantries is that we have enough to help give us our daily bread. We have enough to loan to deserving families and communities through KIVA.org, where our money is repaid and then re-loaned. We have enough to purchase animals through the Heifer project to help families produce their own daily bread. We have enough to help with Shop and Drop to ensure that families in Pontiac have their daily bread. We have enough to buy extra at the grocery store and drop it here at the church so people around the city have their daily bread. We have enough time to go to Forgotten Harvest and pack food so people will have their daily bread.

My challenge to you then is this. As you come to the table and are fed by God, ask yourself how you might fulfill this portion of the prayer, by helping to give others their daily bread.