

“Bread & Body: The Lord’s Prayer, part 3”

by Scott Runyon

Jan 21, 2018

FBCB

Matthew 6:5-13

CHILDREN’S TIME

For thousands of years bread has been one of the most important parts of our diet. Bread comes in all shapes, sizes, and flavors. Here are a few pictures of bread people eat in other countries. Pretty cool, eh?

Some of us probably eat bread in some form every day.

What is your favorite kind of bread?

In the Bible, bread was very important to life. There was a time when God’s people were starving in the desert. Every morning, God sent bread from the sky that settled on the ground for the people to eat every morning. Another time, Jesus fed a crowd of 5000 people with just five loaves of bread and two small fish.

Jesus also taught his disciples to pray? He taught them, “Give us this day our daily bread.”

Yes, bread is, and always has been, a very important part of life. Bread tastes really good, and when we are hungry, eating bread helps to satisfy our hunger.

God made us so that we need to eat food to live, and God also made us to enjoy the food we eat. Did you ever think about how God might be happy when we enjoy good food that makes us healthy. I think that God would smile when we really enjoy a good meal.

So it is important to remember that whenever we eat we can thank God not only for the food, but for the gift of enjoying food — God made us that way and it is great!

Let’s pray and thank God...

SERMON

Two weeks ago, we began this sermon series on the Lord’s Prayer. We talked about how Jesus’ disciples followed him as their rabbi, much like hens follow the lead of roosters. They imitated him as their rabbi. He taught them his prayer which summarized the core of his teaching about how they were to think, act, and live.

Through words like “us” and “our” he teaches us that God wants us to think about and be ministering with people beyond the white picket fences that we have erected.

Last week, we talked about how the Kingdom of Heaven is here because God is here living among us. God’s Kingdom is different from the kingdoms of this world and is built through God’s presence in us, as a community.

Heaven is not just a reward or the place we go after we die, but a reality right here and now.

What does the Kingdom of Heaven look like? It looks like you living out the Lord’s Prayer — it looks like you doing the will of God and living like Jesus lived — caring for the poor, visiting those in prison, giving generously to those in need.

Today we are considering the petition in the Lord’s Prayer:

“Give us this day our daily bread.”

When we talk about bread in the church we often talk about it on a spiritual level. Bread is a metaphor, like Jesus describing himself as the “bread of life.”

In a spiritual sense, God’s bread, is the Word, or the person of Jesus, and satisfies the needs of our soul.

We are reminded of this when we eat bread during Communion and consider among other things, God’s power to forgive (which by the way, is next week’s sermon).

In the Bible we find “spiritual food” that nourishes the soul.

Bread can be a powerful metaphor!

But there is also a concrete way to understand this reference to bread in the Lord’s Prayer.

Let’s consider that the bread Jesus was talking about is actual, real food we eat during a meal — literal bread that satisfies our bodily hunger and provides nutrition for our physical bodies.

Bread in Jesus’ day, in the Middle East was the main staple in everyone’s diet. When people talked about “bread,” it referred to everything that people ate, the whole meal.

Perhaps even more than today, in Jesus’ day, food was recognized as what sustained life, it was the essence of physical bodily health and vitality.

In this prayer, are several references to God honoring the physical world and our physical bodies including what it takes to keep them healthy.

It is clear that God is concerned with our physical bodies. After all, God made these physical bodies of ours and placed us here in a very physical way with the need to eat.

Think about your most memorable meal this past week? Where did you eat it, and with whom?

I think God would be smiling as you not only ate to nourish your body, but also enjoyed the meal. This is an important part of being human.

When was the last time you slowly ate a meal and savored every bite with thankful reflection?

In this petition about bread, Jesus affirmed the goodness of our physical bodies, and this takes us back to Genesis.

In the creation story, for five days, God said that what was created was good. Then, when God created the bodies of human beings on the sixth day and breathed life into them, God said they were VERY good.

This reminds me of my work of nearly 20 years as a massage therapist.

Years ago, I was helping to teach a massage therapy workshop in Ann Arbor. During the morning we were demonstrating work with the pectoral muscles in the front of the shoulders. One female student approached me during a break and described how she had come in that morning feeling positive, excited, and eager to learn. Then during the practice portion of the work, where students work with each other, her class partner began working with her pec muscles and she started feeling agitated and irritated. She even felt the urge to hit this friend of hers who was working with her. She wondered what was going on.

I offered several possible reasons this might happen. As I spoke, her head went down. She then confided in me that she had been sexually abused when she was younger. Perhaps she is one who is now declaring with so many other women "Me too!"

In response to the traumatic abuse, she developed a physical posture that protected her both emotionally and physically. It was a posture that had her pec muscles tight and

shoulders rounded forward for protection. When her class partner started working with her pecs, encouraging them to release, she experienced an emotional reaction of vulnerability.

With a new awareness of how her physical body was holding her past abuse, she had new access to healing.

Massage therapy taught me the profound reality that we are integrated beings. We have physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and social dimensions, and all of these combine to form our total experience of being human.

When one dimension of our life is impacted by disease, injury, or healing, all the other dimensions of our life are impacted too.

Several years ago I hadn't eaten lunch and in the afternoon had a bag of potato chips sitting in a seat next to me on an hour-long drive. By the time I reached my destination, I looked over to see an empty bag. Hmm, what happened?

Later in the evening I was really grumpy and didn't feel all that good. Then I realized "Oh! That's what

happens when you eat a whole bag of potato chips."

What we put in our mouth effects all of our being.

Without the modern psychological, biological, and anatomical understandings that we have today, Jesus understood the holistic and interconnected nature of humanity when he healed and fed people.

In his prayer, Jesus affirms our physical bodies and what they need to be healthy.

Now, let's take a look at the words Jesus used. "Give us THIS DAY..." is very clear. We ask for something needed today.

This is reflected in the gospels and throughout the Old Testament all the way back to Genesis. It was a common teaching that accumulating or hoarding food or wealth for one's self is harmful to community and for ourselves.

Jesus routinely addressed those who had so much money or possessions that it became a burden and distraction for them to live faithfully.

He talked about how difficult it was for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Rather than being distracted by all of the things we want, Jesus' prayer re-focuses our attention on what is right in front of us — what we need for today alone.

“Give us THIS DAY...”

The challenging part of this petition is what “DAILY” means. It seems perhaps redundant to say “Give us TODAY our DAILY bread.”

The word “daily” comes from the Greek word “epiousios.” It has been translated as “daily” for centuries. However, Matthew is the only place that this word is used in all of the New Testament. In fact, it is the only place it is found in all of Greek historical documents or literature!

Many think that Matthew must have made up this Greek word.

Going back to the earliest Christian Fathers of the first few generations of the Church, there were two basic interpretations of this word.

1. Some said the word had to do with time. They said it meant “today” or “tomorrow” — as in: “Give us today our bread for

tomorrow.”

This would have reminded the disciples of the manna the Hebrew people received from Heaven while in the wilderness after leaving slavery in Egypt. They received manna through the night to nourish them only for the next day. In this way, the people depended on God, and God sustained them day by day by day.

It is possible that Jesus meant in his prayer that we also need to be completely dependent on God for our sustenance each day.

2. A second interpretation by the Church Fathers was that this word, translated “daily” had nothing to do with time. Instead, it had to do with the AMOUNT of bread, as in: “Give us today ENOUGH to eat.”

So, one understanding had to do with a time frame of today or tomorrow, and the other had to do with the amount of bread. So, which is it?

Maybe the word has the flavor of both of these interpretations: time and amount. The petition could be translated:

“God, give us enough food for today.”

For those living on the margins of society in poverty (people Jesus was very concerned about) a great and ongoing fear each day is that they may not have enough basic resources, including food, to live.

The fear about not having enough is a daily experience that drives people to lie, steal, beg — whatever they can do, because their very survival is at stake. What they might need next week or even tomorrow isn't on the radar. They are in touch with a DAILY need.

There is a story about this that comes from the days of Nazi control in Poland when food was used as a tool of manipulation and control. People were each given one loaf of bread every eight days, but that loaf was typically gone in two.

There was a young boy named Roman whose father was suffering malnutrition and was sick and dying. He was moved to the infirmary where Roman went to visit him.

Roman knew his father had a half loaf of bread hidden under his mattress and this troubled him

because like everyone else he was very hungry and every waking hour was consumed by thoughts of food.

He was left with a moral dilemma. Should he take the bread while his father lay there still alive, but near death? If he did, it would be like he had given up on him, and he would be breaking the commandment to honor his father and mother, something he was taught as a faithful Jew.

So Roman resolved to wait until his father died before taking the bread. His father lingered on the edge of death for days. Every moment that Roman sat there at his father's bedside he didn't think so much about the fact that his father was dying, but about that half loaf of bread under his bed.

He was preoccupied with it because his own hunger was so great. He hoped it wouldn't be eaten by a rat, rot, or be discovered by someone else before his father died.

One morning Roman discovered that his father had died during the night. He went to the infirmary to find his father's bed empty and no bread under the mattress.

In the environment where people were perpetually hungry and in order to survive they needed to live as predators looking for every opportunity to find and take food, Roman determined that he could no longer live a moral life. Instead, he needed to live for his own self preservation and take whatever he could whenever he had the chance.

Unjust systems do this to people.

Imagine people who are living in poverty praying Jesus' prayer.

“God, give us enough food for today.”

For those who live day to day with desperate longing for basic necessities like food, praying that God would provide what they need on a daily basis is a powerful word of hope.

Imagine now how this prayer might sound for a person who is rich. It has a very different ring.

For the rich, this prayer has power to keep in check the strong temptation to accumulate more and more for the self and at the same time neglect the needs of others — perhaps even blaming others for not having enough.

For the rich, it is all too easy to ignore those who live in poverty using all sorts of justification.

When we take this prayer seriously, we can feel the tension — because we don't always live the way it calls us to live.

How many of you can feel that tension? I can.

We know that this prayer has power to transform us, but we are resisting, justifying, giving good reasons not to give.

A single mother of four called the church this past week from perhaps a half hour away asking for some food. Looking for a solution, I called and spoke to the pastor of a church a few houses away who justified not giving to her because she wasn't willing to join his church.

We need grace. We need strength. We need courage to recognize the real human needs around us and act generously as Jesus did.