

Wesley United Methodist Church  
Rev. Beverly E Stenmark  
Title: Give Us This Day  
Text: Exodus 16:2-5, 12-16  
Matthew 6:25-34

Give us This Day, Our daily bread.

With these words, the Lord's prayer shifts focus. Up to this point, the focus has been on naming who God is, and desiring that God's kingdom would come and that God's will would be done. But now, it shifts and focuses more on the needs of those who are praying.

Once again, this is a time to notice that there is no "me, my, or mine" in this prayer. This prayer that Jesus taught his disciples and that we pray with great regularity, is a prayer about community. And yet, it is still a deeply personal prayer.

Pastor Don Underwood, in his book, Pray Like Jesus, tells about having breakfast with a friend. At the end of their time together he asked her, how long she had been sober. He writes, "She did something I will never forget. She reached into her purse, pulled out her smartphone, and tapped an app. 'Here' she said, 'It keeps track for me.' I looked at the screen of her phone, and there was a simple number: 7,470. I knew exactly what it meant. She had been sober for 7,470 days.

"The way she answered that question makes a difference. She could have said that she had been sober for more than twenty years. But that really would not have captured the way in which she thinks about life nor the method by which she had maintained sobriety over all those years. More than twenty years ago she had gone to her knees one morning and

prayed this simple prayer: ‘Lord, please keep me sober today.’ The next morning, she had done the same thing. And then a third morning. For 7,470 days, she had started her morning with the same routine: ‘Lord, please keep me sober today.’ Ask any person who is in recovery, and they will tell you that the secret to sobriety is living as faithfully as possible one day at a time.”<sup>i</sup>

When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread,” he was echoing a deeply rooted Old Testament understanding. You just heard me read from the book of Exodus, where the Israelites had complained that they did not have enough food to eat. God’s response was to give them food every day – but only enough for each day. In the section following what I read, the people gathered this unknown grain. Some gathered more than they needed and attempted to save some for the next day. When the next morning arrived, however, what they had saved smelled terrible and was filled with worms. God had promised to provide enough each day, but some of them did not trust God’s promise.

Later, on the day before the Sabbath, when they gathered the grain, they had twice as much as on any other day. Moses told them to prepare it and save half for the next day, the Sabbath, when they were to do no work. On the Sabbath, the saved grain was still good. However, once again there were some who simply had to test God and went out to look for grain on the desert floor and found none.

Throughout the Bible we see that faith is a commitment to a journey, to a commitment to trust God one day at a time. Abraham and Sarah didn’t know where they were going when God told them to set off. Mary and Joseph didn’t know what would happen when they began the long journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Jesus’ disciples did not know what would

happen in their lives when they agreed to follow Jesus. The same is true for us today. Faith and following Jesus doesn't come with a guarantee that will be well and that we will never be in want or need. Still, God does give us what we need for the journey – one day at a time – and sometimes even five minutes at a time.

When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread” there were many people for whom this was a very literal need. You may remember from some of Jesus' parables that workers were paid daily for their labor – the vast majority of people really did live day to day. Sadly, today there are still too many around the world and even in our community for whom food insecurity is a reality.

I think this is again where we need to remember that this is a community prayer. Our prayer is “Give **us** this day our daily bread.” That is much broader than “give me my daily bread.” The reality is that for most, if not all, of us gathered here, we really don't need to worry about having enough food to eat today. For some of us, we have far too much food to eat and may actually be causing harm to our bodies by the amount of food we consume.

God has provided us with more than enough in this world to satisfy the needs of every person in the world. The problem seems to be that those of us with more than enough and too much are not sharing with those who have too little.

We have only to look around us to hear the way that people who are in need are described. We hear that they are lazy, unwilling to work, and often even worse. We have heard that those who are healthy and have made good decisions shouldn't have to pay for those who are unhealthy. Many of us don't have to look further than ourselves or our families to know

that many people are suffering not because they made bad decisions, not because they didn't take care of themselves, but because life happens. My grandson required heart surgery as an infant – not because of anything either he or his mother or anyone else did, but simply because that was how he was born. People are born with diseases or birth defects that are not anyone's fault but simply because. Most of us have stories to share that are similar.

For those who have mostly been healthy, employed and independent, the reality is that it only takes one accident, one mistake, one blood clot, one natural disaster to transform an independent lifestyle into one dependent upon the good health and charity of others.<sup>ii</sup>

When we pray "Give us this day our daily bread" we are praying for the community, for all people. Last week, I reminded us that when we pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," we are part of helping that to happen. We are the ones who are to help provide food for those who are hungry. We the ones who are to help provide for the needs of all of God's children – not only ourselves. For when some of God's children are in need, then all of us are in need. We cannot be complete until the needs of all are met. If we are fortunate enough to be healthy, or employed, or generally getting along okay, then we are to be the answer to prayer for someone else when he or she prays this part of the Lord's prayer.

To ask God to "Give us this day our daily bread" is to ask for the basic necessities of life. While many of us are not lacking in bread, or food, we may be lacking in other great needs.

The most basic of human needs is to feel secure – not only physically but also emotionally, mentally, spiritually. We all need to be not only

physically secure but we also need to be valued for who we are; we need to be appreciated for our talents and abilities. Some of us may be starving spiritually and we need to reach out to God and trust God to meet our spiritual needs on a daily basis.

The catch is that we often need the presence of other people for all of our deepest survival needs to be met. We need friendships; we need companions on the journey; we need others, just as we are needed by others.

Remember the woman I mentioned at the beginning who for 7,470 days had begun each day by praying, “Lord, Please, keep me sober today”. We, too, need to begin each day with a simple prayer asking God to help us with our most basic need each day – to stay connected to God. When we do this, we begin to recognize and celebrate the abundance that we have in good times, and we become more prepared to lean upon God in challenging times. And, we can be assured that those challenging times will come into each of our lives.

Our strength in those challenging and difficult times will come from our relationship with God but it will come only one day at a time. Dr. Robert E. Goodrich, the senior pastor at a United Methodist Church in Dallas Texas, and who later became a Bishop had a wonderful way of illustrating our need for this daily reliance upon God. He said that we should try to imagine the strongest bridge in the world; one that has been carefully designed and built to withstand enormous loads. “Then he said, think about the amount of traffic that would cross this bridge in any one day or one week or one year. Automobiles and large trucks and enormous trailers of heavy equipment would be able to cross the bridge with no problem whatsoever as long as they traveled one at a time. As long as the

traffic flowed smoothly, the bridge would still be strong and functional.... But what if just one day's traffic were to be placed on the bridge all at once? Even the strongest bridge ever built would crumble under the combined weight of all that traffic." (We had an illustration of this concept recently, here in Rhode Island, when a large truck carrying a much larger load, was detained because of concern of that great weight crossing certain bridges at one time.)

"God created the human being to be like that bridge, he said. If we face our problems and challenges one day at a time, we will always find the strength to endure. But most of us, fallible as we are, are tempted to pile up the weight of many burdens all at once. We will think and worry not just about the challenges awaiting us this day, but also about the failures of the past and the worries of the future. Our sadness about things long gone, and our anxieties about issues we may never actually face, will accelerate our stress about the real issues we are now facing. Like the strongest bridge in the world, not even the strongest person in the world can endure the weight of so many thoughts and worries. ... We simply forget that God gives us the strength to face nearly any crisis, but only one day at a time."<sup>iii</sup>

God will provide our daily bread – whether it is physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual – so that we can live the lives God intended us to live and so that we can help provide for others so that they too can live as God intended them to be able to live.

Some of us are old enough to remember the musical Godspell back in the early 1970's. One of the songs in that, "Day by Day" speaks powerfully to this prayer and this need. "O Dear Lord, Three things I pray: To see Thee more clearly, Love Thee more dearly, Follow Thee more nearly, day by day, day by day, day by day."<sup>iv</sup>

Our faith must be practiced on a daily basis if we really expect it to transform our lives in any significant way, and if we really expect God to give us the strength to face all that life has on a daily basis.

Underwood described a spiritual practice of his that I would encourage us to practice this week. He said that when he has prayed, “Give us this day our daily bread”, he has visualized a big table reminding him that we do not really live alone, we do not suffer alone, and we do not thrive alone. He reminds us that we cannot really pray for ourselves without also praying for others, and when we pray for others it enriches God’s presence in our lives. He says that he has visualized the face of each person sitting at the table with him and has focused on their physical, emotional and spiritual needs. At first, those he visualized were the people he loved the most but after a time that started to change and he would suddenly discover other people at this table in his mind.

I would like to invite us to do that. This week as you pray, think about, visualize people gathered at the table with you as you pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.” You may find yourself suddenly thinking about people you hadn’t thought about, someone who needs some special prayers, someone who needs to hear from you, someone who you don’t know but who, for you, will represent an entire group of people – people who are hungry or afraid, or in need of medical care, or companionship, or safety. I will warn you that this kind of prayer can take you to places you hadn’t anticipated and might demand a response from you, but you won’t regret it. You will find your relationship with God deepened and richer than you imagined.

“Our Father, who art in heaven. Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread.” Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Underwood, Don, Pray Like Jesus: Rediscovering the Lord’s Prayer, Loc. 491-499.

<sup>ii</sup> Meier, Paul The Lord’s Prayer, loc 588

<sup>iii</sup> Underwood, Loc. 589-599

<sup>iv</sup> “Day by Day” from Godspell.