

Our Daily Bread

1 Kings 17: 8-16

Matthew 6: 7-15

March 6, 2022

Rev. Donna Vuilleumier

1 Kings 17: 8-16

Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, 'Go now to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there; for I have commanded a widow there to feed you.' So he set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, 'Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink.' As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, 'Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.' But she said, 'As the Lord your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die.' Elijah said to her, 'Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son. For thus says the Lord the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied, and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the Lord sends rain on the earth.' She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days. The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah.

Matthew 6: 7-15

'When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

'Pray then in this way:

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

Your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And do not bring us to the time of trial,

but rescue us from the evil one.

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

--

How can we pray, how can we understand, "Give us this day our daily bread" in a community where we can drive to Shaw's and be barraged with so many choices of whole wheat, honey wheat, rye, pumpernickel, sour dough, white, ciabatta, bagels, pita, naan, baguette, rolls, buns, thins, multigrain, brioche, marble, challah, focaccia, and many others? How can we pray, how can we understand, "Give us this day our daily bread," when it is so easy even in this

time of supply chain gaps and delays to stock our freezers for weeks at a time, or we can choose to not have bread as a staple part of our keto or gluten free or low carb lifestyle?

“Give us this day our daily bread.” There is a whole message to that prayerful sentence, that instruction, but it begins with being able to fully, honestly, grasp just what ‘our daily bread,’ is really all about. Jesus’ words speak of a dependence on him, on God, for even the most basic essentials of our lives. For those of us who do not live with food insecurity wondering if our next meal will actually be today, or who are not refugees in need of safety, shelter and sustenance, or who readily identify with ancestors who fed on the manna of the Exodus wilderness, or who live so remotely that access to enough to eat requires dependence upon weather, schedules and luck, ‘our daily bread,’ has a wonderful spiritual essence to it, yet Jesus meant so much more by those words.

When Jesus spoke of ‘our daily bread,’ it was symbolic of *all* our daily needs—our physical, emotional and spiritual needs- as in biblical times bread was the staple of life that needed to be baked fresh every single day. Even today we use the word ‘bread’ to mean food in general and we use the phrase “breaking bread together” to indicate the sharing of any kind of meal with someone.

It was just after feeding the crowd of thousands with just a few loaves of bread and two fish that Jesus encouraged them to not work for the food that perishes but for the food that leads to eternal life, teaching them that he is the Bread of Life; and whoever comes to him shall not hunger, and whoever believes in him shall never thirst.

Give us this day our daily bread.

Give. This one little word is essential in understanding all that Jesus meant for us to grasp. Give—in asking God to give us the most basic necessities we are acknowledging our dependence upon God, and we are recognizing and naming our trust that God will take care of us. We have been created with God-given needs so that God can meet those needs. ‘Give’ is not a demand we make of God, but an affirmation of our dependence.

Us. This even smaller word is Jesus teaching us that we are to pray for the needs of others. The prayer begins with ‘Our Father’ as we join together in spirit with all of God’s beloved children. This prayer reminds us of the processes by which we receive our bread. It is a prayer for the farmer who plants the seed, the migrant who harvests the crop, the baker who makes the bread, the trucker who transports it, and the grocer that stocks it.

To be followers of Jesus who claim and pray this prayer we must be willing to be a part of God’s answer as well. Our world has more than enough food to feed everybody in it, has more than enough for all. We pray this here, and we pray this same hope for equity in our Communion prayer that one day sharing by all will mean scarcity for none.

This day. We are reminded not to get ahead of ourselves, not to hold onto or hoard more than we need. We are reminded that this day, each day, we are to walk our talk. Live in this day, in the present, rather than becoming lost in the unchangeable past or worrying about what the future might be.

This day. A widow in Zarephath had thought ‘this is the day my son and I will die,’ as famine had ravaged her land leaving them only a tiny bit of meal to make one small cake as their last supper, yet she found both the faith and the courage to honor hospitality to Elijah, to feed him with a daily bread that came to feed all of them until the famine ended.

Our daily bread. Everything we need to live today, this day, is from God. Our daily needs are known and recognized. In teaching us to pray, Jesus taught us to not set our hearts, minds and hopes on what we want, but on our needs.

I invite us now to take these words of a prayer written by Kathy Hedge, and make them our prayer too:

“Lord, I don’t think I have ever really worried about daily bread. You have given me an abundance of bread and everything else I need. When I go to the grocery store, I get lost in all the variety, color, and sheer numbers. I have given away boxes, a roomful of things to charity. They are things I do not need or no longer want, and still I have more than enough. You have allowed me to have things far in excess of daily bread – of what I truly need to live.

And yet I am still hungry!

Sometimes, I fear the things I have. They steal my best time and energy by crying for my attention: Buy me! Eat me! Wear me! Upgrade me!

And so, I am hungry because I am feeding my greed and not my soul. How much is enough, Lord? How much is too much? What can I live without? I don’t want too little, for fear of becoming bitter and anxious. Nor do I need too much, lest I turn complacent and blind to the needs of others.

Give us this day our daily bread.... I need bread to stay alive, but without the Bread of Life, I will never truly live.

Teach me contentment, Jesus. Show me a way of true delight in the things of this earth, without mad cravings to own or control. Increase my hunger for you and for the things of your Spirit.

May I never desire anything – a tasty meal, a beautiful dress, even a cozy home – unless you are in the desire, helping me to be grateful and generous. Amen.