

## “Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread”

Scripture: Exodus 16:1-15; Proverbs 30:7-9; Mark 6:30-44

What does it take to satisfy us? What fills us and gives us a sense of completion and the ability to live into Jesus’ call for us to no longer worry? When Jesus and the disciples hand out the endless bread and fish to the 7500 or so gathered on the hill that day long ago, the text says, “all ate and were satisfied”. What satisfied those on the hill? Was it the bread and the fish? Was it Jesus’ teaching beforehand? Was it the service of the disciples, taking the time to serve all those people? Was it the miracle itself?

See, I think it is almost impossible for us to answer the question, “What satisfies me?” I would say all of us gathered here today have our basic needs covered. Our basic satisfactions are attended to. Most of our dissatisfactions, then, are abstract - I am not living up to the expectations of my parents or society; I am not living into my potential; I am not following my passion or calling.

We make things very difficult for ourselves, don’t we? The Lord’s Prayer is thick with theological reflection. Once a person starts asking questions about it, there is an endless fountain of teaching and wisdom that springs forth from this prayer. It enfolds and embraces the past, the present and the future, earthly and spiritual truths, daily life and eternal life, and good and evil.

I was struck by something this week regarding this section of the Lord’s Prayer, however. I was outside mowing the lawn. I have a reel mower, by the way; a human-powered mower to reduce my carbon footprint, but more because I got so frustrated with owning a power mower. The constant cleaning of the blades, mechanical problems, having to fill it with gas - it was just a whole lot of work. With my reel mower, the biggest repair I have had to do was remove a stick from the reel so it could mow again. Oh, I sharpened the blades a couple weeks ago as well. That I have to do about once every 2 years. It is a simple machine. So I get a great workout, have minimal frustration and feel pretty good when I am done with the lawn.

How cool my mower is isn’t what struck me. What did occur to me was what I was doing with my mind. I was thinking about all the reading and all the things I needed to do for the sermon. My work was “out there”, “away from here”, different from what I was doing right now. Mowing the lawn was an interference, a boundary between the ‘real’ work I needed to do and the ‘simple’ work I had to do. Using a reel mower means about an hour of time to mow our backyard, and that hour of time was taking away from my time writing my sermon. It was an imposition, a chore, a task which...

You see the progression here. It is funny, really. When Jesus asks us to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread”, he did not mean, “Avoid all the things you have to do and focus instead on me”. In fact, as I discovered about 20 minutes into mowing the lawn, it means exactly the opposite. I should have known this. I have studied commentaries on The Lord’s Prayer, so I really have no excuse other than hating having a lawn. My father didn’t like having a lawn so he created fantastic gardens that negated the presence of grass.

But this short phrase from the Lord’s Prayer does a lot. It blesses our work. It blesses others work. It blesses creation. It blesses all things in such a way that they provide for us so that we might find a meaningful relationship with God, even in the simplest of things. Luther puts it this way in his Large Catechism:

*“It is a brief and simple word, but it has a very wide scope. For when you mention and pray for daily bread, you pray for everything that is necessary in order to have and enjoy daily bread and, on the other hand, against everything which interferes with it. Therefore you must open wide and extend your thoughts not only to the oven or the flour-bin, but to the distant field and the entire land, which bears and brings to us daily bread and every sort of sustenance. For if God did not cause it to grow, and bless and preserve it in the field, we could never take bread from the oven or have any to set upon the table.” (LC, Lord’s Prayer, 4th Petition, par. 72)*

We must develop a relationship with the simplest parts of our daily lives and creation itself in such a way that we can begin to see God’s presence within it. This is what the Israelites are learning in the desert. Learning how to see God in creation takes a long, long time, especially when all the training before hand is to see the power of the state, the power of the oppression, the power of the ruler and how we should bow down to that idol. Note that Luther says, not only does this part of the Lord’s prayer pray for everything necessary for our having and enjoying daily bread, but also prays for everything that opposes it as well.

The Israelites are given manna from heaven after complaining incessantly to Moses. They want to go back to Egypt. Back there, they got meat at night. There were beds to sleep on. They were cared for. And all of that provision, all of that food, all of that protection came from the power of the empire, the power of the state. It is all great, except for the part where you must bow down before a false god in order to receive it. While they were there, the Israelites felt the full weight of oppression. When they were away, they forgot. When things were difficult in an identifiable way, it was easy to wish for deliverance. When the difficulty became about them, it became very hard to trust the one who delivered them.

In the desert, the Israelites are being trained out of a slave mindset, out of a mindset of dependence on human power. They are being trained into a freedom mindset, a mindset of interdependence that thrives on trust in Godly power. Remember last week when we spoke of how eternal things influence earthly things? This week we see how earthly things, those things provided by God, inform, reinforce and expand our trust in the God who gives them. This is what is happening in the desert when the Lord gives manna (‘what is it?’) to the people.

When we speak of God’s provision and trusting God, we must begin, especially in the case of the Lord’s Prayer, to begin to think in terms of small things, and see ourselves as Piglet says, ‘very small animals’. There is a deep humility present in praying for our daily bread because we are acknowledging with the Israelites all those eons ago and with the crowd on the hill being fed by Jesus that we are not the source of our provision. Like the Psalmist says,

*14 The LORD upholds all who are falling and raises up all who are bowed down.*

*15 The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season.*

*16 You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing. (Ps 145)*

This is why God tells the Israelites in the desert to not hoard the manna they receive. When we hoard things, when we abandon our trust in God’s hand and the satisfaction he provides, we cannot know satisfaction,

we cannot 'eat our fill and be satisfied' like the people on the hill. Praying that our work be blessed, our harvesting be blessed, those who bring the food to us be blessed and that all those things which prevent the free flow of God's provision be dismantled and eradicated, means we begin to develop a 'small' sensibility in our daily lives. Trusting that the Lord will provide *really* means becoming like the Israelites.

Earthly things, when we have a sense of our position relative to God's creation, when we trust that God will in fact provide for *us* (remember, it is 'Give *us* our daily bread'), point us to Godly things. The simplest of foods - manna - provides for a whole people. The trust and interdependence on Jesus turns 5 loaves and 2 fishes into enough to feed 5000 men and their families on a hillside in Judea.

I began by asking "What satisfies you?" We are hoarders in America. We always need more. We even have a TV show that explores the lives of hoarders. We don't know what it means to be satisfied. I read an article this past week that in developed countries almost 50% of food gets thrown away - from grocery stores, from restaurants, from peoples' homes. We have no idea how we are satisfied by the Lord.

Imagine for a moment how terrifying it would be to be faced with a desert in all directions with no apparent food in any direction. Imagine how good the past would seem to be, even if it meant slavery, oppression and the denial of personhood, if that past meant you were fed.

And now imagine being faced with oppression, slavery and threats when you have learned to trust completely in God's provision. The person, the people, who trusts in God is no longer threatened by tyrants, the past or an unknown future, because they know God will provide and what God provides will be enough and will satisfy. That trust begins in simple things - bread, bread given daily. That trust spreads in dry fields like a small seed, perhaps the smallest of seeds, like a mustard seed. Or like a little bit of yeast spread through the dough. That trust grows and expands and we begin to learn with the Israelites that God will always provide.

Every part of our daily lives becomes an opportunity for the presence of God to be seen. Brother Lawrence, who wrote a little devotional book called *Practicing the Presence of God*, was a monk who was the cook for a monastery. He had opportunities to get out of the kitchen and do other, more important, things. He was even in line to become the abbot of the monastery. He turned it down because he had committed himself to finding God in the smallest of tasks, in the most menial work. Brother Lawrence wrote,

*"We should fix ourselves firmly in the presence of God by conversing all the time with Him...we should feed our soul with a lofty conception of God and from that derive great joy in being his. We should put life in our faith. We should give ourselves utterly to God in pure abandonment, in temporal and spiritual matters alike, and find contentment in the doing of His will, whether he takes us through sufferings or consolations."*

I did finish mowing the lawn. It was a much better experience once I understood that this week's section of the Lord's Prayer points us into the smallest and most menial parts of our lives. Our daily bread is at once the bread upon our table at our meals, and at the same time, the presence of God and Christ in every detail of our lives. We want to separate them. Perhaps our work is unsatisfying; perhaps our day is not bringing us any satisfaction; perhaps what we are feeding upon during the day brings no nourishment - literally and figuratively. The prayer for the Lord to 'give us this day our daily bread' is a prayer for simplicity, a prayer for seeing the presence of God in the presence of small things and a prayer for humility in the face of the greatness of God.

The Shakers of the late 18th century had a lot of theological issues, but they got something very right in their very short hymn, *'Tis the Gift to be Simple'*. The verses say:

*'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free  
'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,  
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,  
'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.  
When true simplicity is gain'd,  
To bow and to bend we shan't be asham'd,  
To turn, turn will be our delight,  
Till by turning, turning we come 'round right.*

May it be so for each of us and let us all come 'round right to the blessing of our work, the blessing of what we have received from others and, most of all, the blessing of God's simple giving of bread, faith and Christ to us. Amen.