

Lord, teach us to pray:  
#6 – “Give us bread (2)”

Matthew 6: 11  
Mark 6: 30-44  
John 19:28

In the story of the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness, we read that the first way by which Satan tempted Jesus to misuse his divine power was to turn the stones on the ground into loaves of bread, thus satisfying his hunger. Jesus responded that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word which comes from the mouth of God. It was an absolutely true response, affirming our complete dependency upon God above all else. Notice, however, that Jesus never refuted or denied our human need for bread, just that it is not by mere bread alone that we survive.

It's been said that the petition, “give us this day our daily bread” is without meaning if it is not also understood to mean just this simple thing: Lord, feed us. We need bread. Bread for the day. Bread for our tummies. Bread for our basic human need for food, even as we ask for that bread of heaven found in your Word and grace, the bread of promise, the bread of blessing, the bread of life that is Jesus. Give us bread, in all the forms of bread which we need, lest we starve.

I emphasize that most basic and simple request voiced in the Lord's Prayer, because like so much of our religious behaviour, we are sometimes tempted to over-spiritualize certain elements of faith and completely lose sight of the fullness of God's homely care and compassion for his people. As a consequence, then, we are also apt to lose sight of God's invitation and summons to homely everyday discipleship.

Kevin and I were at a study event in Vancouver yesterday, which focussed on the challenge of being the church in mission in our immediate back yard. What amazed and saddened me was that so many of the folk there could not envision mission as other than giving up all one's immediate and familiar life in order to go to the other side of the world as if there alone was the place where mission happened. There seemed to be an inability for some to comprehend that mission might also mean providing the simple bread of friendship to the person living next door.

In one of his books, Eugene Peterson reminds us that we *are flesh-and-blood creatures. We need bread in order to live. Daily bread. Fresh bread. We are souls destined for eternity, but these souls are embodied with digestive systems. If we don't eat, we won't pray.*

The old Scottish expositor, William Barclay, in his commentary on this passage rightly says that this part of the prayer tells us that God cares for our bodies. Jesus showed us that, he says, in the way he brought physical healing to the physical bodies of the people he met as well as in the way he fed the physical tummies of men and women with physical hunger – even to the number of more than four and five thousand of them at a time. Barclay went on to assert: *Any teaching which belittles, and despises, and slanders the body is wrong. We can see what God thinks of our human bodies when we remember that He himself in Jesus Christ took that upon him. It is not simply soul salvation, it is whole salvation, the salvation of body, mind and spirit, at which Christianity aims.* It was, after all, as the writer of the letter to the Hebrews put it, not angelic beings that Christ came to help and save, but human beings, and thus did the Son become truly human, sharing in every aspect of our humanity.

In the first letter of Peter (5:7), we read the encouragement that we are to cast all our anxieties, all our cares, upon the Lord because he cares for us. That means we

really can come to God and ask for daily bread in every aspect of its meaning. We can ask in our physical hunger for bread for our need. We can ask in our weakness for the bread of kindness, his comfort and strength, his healing and mercy in every aspect of our life. We can ask for truth to guide us, grace to cleanse us, mercy to free us and heaven's love to embrace us. He who became human knows our human needs, every last one of them, and he longs to answer our prayer.

There is, however, something marvellously good and humbling – in the best sense of the word – in learning to ask for something as simple as our daily bread. It reminds us of our dependency on God, and our need for all his provision in every part of our living.

When we pray for daily bread, ever should we remember Jesus needed daily bread as well, and that our Saviour intimately understands our weaknesses and our requirements. When we pray for daily bread, we might well remember how simple a thing this staple of life is – just flour and water. Yeast is optional, as is all the other ingredients that might be added. In the same way, God has ordained life to be rather simple at its most basic. Just as we need food for the body, we need to be fed emotionally, spiritually and relationally. Daily bread should remind us, as God said, that it is not good for man to be alone, and that fundamentally, for life to be full, rich and good, we need each other. When we pray for God to give us daily bread, we are reminded that bread is always given to be shared; that fellowship with God's people is as crucial to wholeness and healthiness as is fellowship with God. Bread reminds us that when Jesus broke and gave bread, it was to a motley crew of followers – a tax collector and a freedom fighter, men learned and unlearned, men from the upper crust and the lowest class. But Jesus erases all the divisions and differences and makes us one in himself, and as we feast together on bread at his table, it is as one family, dependent on the Lord's grace and truly in

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need of each other. There is no such thing as discipleship lived in proud, self-serving isolation; either we are together, humbly feasting on the gifts of grace we don't deserve that come from him who is the bread of life, or else we are trying to find our nourishment on the manna of our self-righteousness. Bread of gratefulness, bread of humility, bread for sharing as sisters and brothers together is God's plan, even as it is God's gift.

Give us bread today, we pray. Friends, even now, the table is spread – the feast God has provided awaits our coming.

Let us pray:

### *THE GREAT PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING*

Lord Jesus, you said: I am the bread of life; he who comes to me will never go hungry and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. Gracious Saviour, please feed us.

You know how we languish and starve because we have sought to feast on all the trivial things this world calls good. We have been content to eat scraps when you offer a banquet, to dine on dust when you long to serve us the finest of meals.

Lord Jesus, speak to our hearts your word of forgiveness, truth and love, that we might be satisfied by the wonder of your kindness. Minister to our woundedness, our longings, our shame, bondage, fears and burdens. Embrace us with your comforting and protecting arms. Help us drink deeply of your Spirit, that we may be renewed, made whole and holy.

Holy God, we marvel again at your great love poured out for us through the death and sacrifice of Jesus. Father God, with thanksgiving we remember how Jesus grieved over the world to which he came. We give thanks that he taught your Word and proclaimed your Kingdom; how he rejoiced over every lost sinner. We praise you for how he healed and showed

mercy to all, with an unending compassion. And we thank you that gathered for the last time with his disciples at the supper meal, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and said: "This is my body broken for you. Remember me." After the supper ended, he did the same thing with the cup: "This cup is my blood, the new covenant. Each time you drink this cup, remember me."

Lord our God, as we come again to Jesus' table, may we find our peace, comfort and hope in unending love with which our Master cares for us. By the Holy Spirit, may both we and these elements be made holy, that we may receive the bread and wine with faith, thankfulness and joy.

All these things we pray in the precious name of Jesus, our Saviour, Lord and friend. Amen.