

## **Bread from Heaven**

**Matthew 6:9-13; Matthew 14:13-21**

Good Morning Friends, welcome here and welcome to those of you who are joining us online today.

We're on our third Sunday of talking through the various phrases of the Lord's prayer. Today, our focus is the line, "Give us this Day our Daily Bread." In my mind, this section marked a shift in prayer, we're moving from the thank yous, the submission to the Father, praying for the will of God to be done to the "stuff of life" -the needs and wants that can sometimes feel overwhelming. Lord, God, give us enough to eat. Give me good health. Give me energy to parent well. Bless those I love. Keep us safe. Honestly, this is the stuff, somewhat mundane and everyday needs and situations that consume much of my mental and physical energy in a given week. And I'll admit that I felt relieved to get to this "practical" part of the prayer in terms of this sermon series. Talk about how God cares for our needs, add in a good metaphor or an inspiring story or two, and bingo, sermon is done.

Ah! The thing I've learned about being someone who writes sermons on a regular basis is that rarely will the Holy Spirit allow me to get away with something that seemingly straightforward. There's always a question that emerges or a niggling feeling that I'm missing something. That, maybe, what felt so clear in my mind, this division between

the spiritual and practical in this prayer, and in my life isn't the point here. Maybe "thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" is actually inextricably linked to this prayer for bread. Maybe Daily Bread and The Kingdom of Heaven are not so far apart as it may seem. That's what we're going to explore together today.

Often when I pray as I start my day in the office, the first bit of time praying feels more contemplative, more "spiritual". The scripture I've read that morning is lingering in my mind, my office is quiet, I can see the beautiful white blanket of snow out of my office window. Then, as I turn my attention towards the people I'm thinking of, the things I'm worried about, the news headlines I see on my phone, that feeling of contemplation leaves me, and my prayers become overwhelming, "Help this person!" "I need so much!" Needs. Needs. Wants. Needs. That shift, which has been part of prayer life as long as I can remember, has bothered me. Like, if I was really a spiritual person, wouldn't my prayers be different? Couldn't I just bask in the goodness of God? Couldn't I forget all the needs and wants for just a little while? Maybe some of you have asked these questions too.

Some of that struggle is rooted in the dualistic thinking that has been pervasive in our culture and Christian theology for a long time. The idea that the Spiritual realm, the realm of the ideas, of contemplation, of deep thought is wholly separate from the secular realm, the realm of work, of cooking meals and doing laundry, the realm of daily life -of needs and wants. And I realized that this way of thinking, this dualistic framework was shaping how I read the Lord's prayer. I was the one drawing a line of separation

between “Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will Be Done, on Earth as it is in Heaven” and “Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread”. Jesus never did this in his ministry. It’s not as though there was spiritual Jesus, who did the praying and the teaching, and then practical Jesus, did the healing and the feeding. No, there was Jesus, who lived out the Culture of God every day. As author Madeleine L’Engle so poignantly said, “There is nothing so secular that it cannot be sacred, and that is the deepest message of the incarnation.”

NT Wright, in his book, *The Lord and His Prayer*, reminds us that our request for daily bread is about so much more than morning toast, it’s about hunger bodies AND hungry souls. He writes, “...The prayer he gave his followers was a prayer for the complete fulfillment of that Kingdom: for God’s people to be rescued from hunger, guilt, and fear...The difference in the Greek between Matthew and Luke’s version of this prayer is tricky. Matthew’s seems to mean ‘give us today our bread for tomorrow’; while Luke understands it as giving us each day our daily bread. They both probably reflect different aspects of what Jesus intended. Matthew, in line with Jesus’ whole agenda, means ‘give us, here and now, the bread of life which was promised for the great Tomorrow. Give us, in other words, the blessings of the coming Kingdom, right now. Matthew, writing his gospel, saw this prayer partially answered in the feedings of the five thousand and the four thousand; more fully in the Last Supper; and, most fully of all, in Jesus’ death and resurrection. But Luke’s version is not to be sneezed at as merely one-dimensional, just praying for boring old bread. The whole point of the Kingdom is that it isn’t about shifting our wants and desires to a non-physical level, moving away from the earthly to the supposedly ‘spiritual’. It is about God’s dimension coming to birth

within ours, which is after all what Advent and Christmas are celebrating. The Kingdom is to ***come on earth as it is in heaven***. Daily needs and desires point beyond themselves, to God's promise of the kingdom in which death and sorrow will be no more. But that means, too, that the promise of the Kingdom includes those needs, and doesn't look down on them sneeringly as somehow second rate."

What can it mean then for us to expand our imaginations and understandings of "Our Daily Bread"? How is it more than just our physical needs and wants? How are our physical needs and wants part of the culture of God? What does Jesus say about Bread in the Culture of God?

Let's use the story of the feeding of the 5,000 to help us unpack this a bit more. I'll read that story again, this time from the New Living Translation." As soon as Jesus heard the news, he left in a boat to a remote area to be alone. But the crowds heard where he was headed and followed on foot from many towns. Jesus saw the huge crowd as he stepped from the boat, and he had compassion on them and healed their sickness. That evening the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away so they can go to the villages and buy food for themselves." But Jesus said, "That isn't necessary—you feed them." "But we have only five loaves of bread and two fish!" they answered. "Bring them here," he said. Then he told the people to sit down on the grass. Jesus took the five loaves and two fish, looked up toward heaven, and blessed them. Then, breaking the loaves into pieces, he gave the bread to the disciples, who distributed it to the people. They all ate as much as they

wanted, and afterward, the disciples picked up twelve baskets of leftovers. About 5,000 men were fed that day, in addition to all the women and children!”

The first thing to take notice of here is the FACT that Jesus does care about our physical needs! The hunger of this crowd is important to him and he addresses, even as the disciples express their disdain at the thought of playing waiters to 5,000 men, women and children on a hillside. The text says that Jesus has compassion on the crowds and healed their sick and feeds their growling stomachs. We’re going to be talking a lot about how the BREAD of Heaven, The bread that Jesus offer in the Culture of God is more than just literal bread, but I also don’t want us to forget that it includes real bread too. Does that make sense? It’s bread and so much more than bread. This sermon is not a message saying, “don’t ask God for the things you lack, the things you need, the desire of your heart.” Because scripture admonishes us to do that very thing, 1 Peter 5:6-7 in the Amplified Bible says this, “ Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God [set aside self-righteous pride], so that He may exalt you [to a place of honor in His service] at the appropriate time, casting all your cares [all your anxieties, all your worries, and all your concerns, once and for all] on Him, for He cares about you [with deepest affection, and watches over you very carefully].”

Secondly, in this story, we are reminded that Jesus’s Culture is one of abundance!

Jesus takes some paltry offering and makes a FEAST out of it. Feed 5,000 people and then gather up the leftovers. The disciples could only see what was lacking, the scarcity of the situation, but Jesus saw only the abundance of the kingdom. Our culture is built

on the idea that there is not enough to go around, not enough money, food, natural resources, health care, love. I especially feel this lately, with the rising cost of living, the headlines about skyrocketing inflation, the eye-bugging prices at the grocery store. Can we talk about the price of butter? Ohmyword. But in the Culture of God, there is always enough, not just enough but an abundance!

This is one the hardest parts of our culture for me to step outside of, this “myth of scarcity” as Theologian Walter Bruggeman calls it. Because it really does seem like there isn’t enough to go around. But if I could truly embrace this idea, this Lyric of Abundance, this core understanding in my being that God will provide and there is more than enough, that fellow grocery shoppers, fellow house hunters are not my competition, but rather, my sisters and brothers. How would that change how I live in this world? I’d worry less. I’d be more generous. I’d recognize the reciprocal humanity in others. I could say that our cultural system is the problem, not the final story of our world.

Jesus tells us, “not to worry about your life. Don't worry about having something to eat, drink, or wear. Isn't life more than food or clothing? Look at the birds in the sky! They don't plant or harvest. They don't even store grain in barns. Yet your Father in heaven takes care of them. Aren't you worth much more than birds? Can worry make you live longer? Why worry about clothes? Look how the wild flowers grow. They don't work hard to make their clothes. But I tell you that Solomon with all his wealth wasn't as well clothed as one of them. God gives such beauty to everything that grows in the fields,

even though it is here today and thrown into a fire tomorrow. God will surely do even more for you! Why do you have such little faith? Don't worry and ask yourselves, "Will we have anything to eat? Will we have anything to drink? Will we have any clothes to wear?" Only people who don't know God are always worrying about such things. Your Father in heaven knows you need all of these. But more than anything else, put God's work first and do what he wants. Then the other things will be yours as well. Don't worry about tomorrow. It will take care of itself. You have enough to worry about today"

Give us this day, our daily bread. Give us the freedom from worry, just like the sparrows.

Lastly, the story of the feeding of the 5,000 tells us that this feast of Daily Bread, and the Bread of Jesus, is for everyone who is hungry, which is all of us. We all need bread in our stomachs and bread to sustain us in life. And Jesus offers this. Isaiah 55:1-3 says, "Is anyone thirsty?

Come and drink—

even if you have no money!

Come, take your choice of wine or milk—

it's all free!

Why spend your money on food that does not give you strength?

Why pay for food that does you no good?

Listen to me, and you will eat what is good.

You will enjoy the finest food.

"Come to me with your ears wide open.

Listen, and you will find life.

I will make an everlasting covenant with you.

I will give you all the unfailing love I promised to David.”

In the Culture of Heaven, the culture that we long and strive to make known here on earth, physical needs are cared for. A spirit of abundance marks our actions and interactions. We rest in the care of Jesus, just like the sparrows. And this culture is for everyone, we are all in this together, thanks to Jesus. So, when we pray for our daily bread, knowing all that it encompasses, how do we live out that now, in our churches and our communities? What does the provision of Heaven look like in our homes, in our church, our relationships are community? How does it look both on a Sunday morning and a Tuesday morning? I hope we can talk about this today, and I hope we can rest together this week.

Displayed on a bookshelf in our home, is a little picture frame. Inside the picture frame is a piece of paper with a song lyric written on it. Taylor heard the song a few years ago and said, "I feel like this describes the Mennonite faith. It says, "The World is a beautiful place, but we have to make it that way.

I know that I've been closing with different versions of the Lord's Prayer at the end of my sermons, but this week, I came across a prayer by theologian Walter Bruggemann that just captures so well, the fullness of what it means for God to



give us our Daily Bread. So, I'll end with that this morning.

“For the Lord God is a sun and a shield-

Giving us grace and glory,

Bestowing favour and honour...

On our own, we conclude:

There is not enough to go around.

And yes in the midst of our perceived deficit You come.

You come, working to give bread in the wilderness

You come, working to give homes to exiles.

You come, working to give futures to the shutdown.

You come- Fleshed in Jesus

And when you come the blind receive their sight,

The lame walk,

The lepers are cleansed,

The deaf hear,

The dead are raised,

The poor dance and sing.

So we watch

And we take food we did not grow,

And live life we did not invent.  
May your giving break our cycles of imagined scarcity,  
Override our presumed deficits,  
Quiet our anxieties of lack,  
Transform our vision so we are able to see  
Your field of mercy and blessing.

May your Spirit settle deep in our lives  
And may your generosity change us,  
That we may give, in wonder, love and praise.  
That which we receive from you

Amen.”