

Season after Pentecost - "Give Us Each Day Our Daily Bread"

August 27 & 28, 2016

Haven Lutheran Church Hagerstown MD

Readings: Psalm 103:1-2,5; Luke 11: 1-3

Let this written and spoken word lead us to the living, Word, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Is it merely coincidence that the Lord's Prayer follows the same pattern as the Ten Commandments? The first three commandments speak to our relationship with God — no other gods; no wrongful use of God's name, remember the Sabbath — and the rest address how we treat one another — honoring parents, not murdering, stealing, lying, coveting, or committing adultery. In the Lord's Prayer, we begin with acknowledging that our dear "Abba," "Father" is also most holy and almighty. We praise God's superior kingdom and will, which we pray to honor and follow. Then the model of prayer Jesus taught us shifts like the commandments to our human needs and challenges. Is the similarity a coincidence? Or a reflection of Jesus' Jewishness, that he, a well-trained Hebrew, would model his prayer life after the pattern the Lord God used for the Commandments? One of those interesting questions to put in our hip pocket for heaven.

After offering worship and praise to God, the Lord's Prayer becomes very earthy. "Give us the day our daily bread." There is so much meaning packed into these seven words. Let's start with daily bread. The response to the question, "What does "daily bread mean," in Luther's Small Catechism is:

"Everything included in the necessities and nourishment for our bodies, such as good, drink, clothing, shoes, house, farm, fields, livestock, money property, an upright spouse, upright children, upright members of the household, upright and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, decency, honor, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like."¹

As Pastor Charles Henrickson put it, "that's a lot of ingredients that go into that one loaf of bread! Imagine if they listed all those things on the package . . . Think of it. You need money to buy the bread. You need a whole bunch of workers to end up with the finished product — the farmer, the baker, the truck driver, the grocer, the cashier at the checkout line."² You need the government to see that products are safe, prices fair, the roads are maintained for transport and the peace and protection that allows us to drive off to the store. Then add in the other necessities like clothing, a home, a good family, neighbors and friends. This is the life-giving bread that feeds body, soul and spirit with what is needed to be prayerful, faithful, empowered children of God and bearers of God's love and kingdom.

Before leaving that image of bread as the staples of life, we must note, as one preacher put it, that Jesus taught us to pray for bread not cupcakes, for needs not greed.

Wrapped in that prayer for “daily bread” is the earnest desire to know what is “enough” and to trust in God’s provision. It’s the lesson the Lord tried to help the Israelites learn in the desert as they moved from slaves in Egypt to living as God’s free people who trusted and obeyed their almighty, loving God. The people cried out in fear once they escaped into the desert. What would they eat in this wilderness? As their panic grew so did their grandiose memories of the food they had as slaves. God provided a food substance that became known as “manna” — which means, “what is it?” Each morning, when the dew had lifted, there was a flaky, fine substance that could be gathered and made into bread. The Lord told them to gather just enough each morning for their daily meals and on the sixth day, enough for two days. But, as people in fear or greed will do, some tried to collect more than they needed for the day. They were surprised to find that any extra collected had become wormy and foul by the next morning. The lesson was to learn to trust God.

That desert lesson is part of our schooling, too, as we genuinely pray the Lord’s Prayer. We don’t ask for filet mignon, we don’t ask for more than we need, we ask only for today’s provision so that we cultivate a trust in God’s faithfulness. Trusting that God will provide “enough” today, frees us from anxiety and worry about tomorrow and things yet to happen. Trusting God to faithfully provide frees our energies to seek other things — like praising God with our lives as we follow God’s will and bring God’s kingdom here on earth.

Perhaps one of the easier-to-miss parts of “give us this day our daily prayer” is that little, two-letter pronoun “us.” We are not praying, “give ME MY daily bread” or “give those I like or love their daily bread” or even, “give all Americans daily bread.” We are praying that ALL peoples in ALL of God’s creation have enough. God has provided enough for all people — be they good or bad. But human economics and history have created systems of distribution that fail to feed all. “By praying “**Our** Father” and “give **US** this day our daily bread,” Jesus is making sure we stay attentive to our neighbor’s needs and not just our own.”³ As when we prayed that God’s will and kingdom come, in this part of the Lord’s Prayer we are asking that God uses us to help those who do not have enough, who do not have the necessities of healthy living. We pray AND help our neighbors in Louisiana and West Virginia whose lives have been flooded and necessities uncertain. We pray AND we feed children through Micah’s backpacks and we’ll feed individuals and families at the Rescue mission on God’s Work Our Hands Saturday. We PRAY and offer help and company to those sitting with loved ones in hospitals just trying to hold life together. “Give US this day our daily bread,” Lord, that we may see the needs of others and give generously from God’s bounty.

Martin Luther wrote about this petition in the Lord's prayer, saying: *"In fact, God gives daily bread without our prayer, even to all evil people, but we ask in this prayer that God cause us to recognize what our daily bread is and to receive it with thanksgiving."*⁴ Why ask God to give what God promises to provide? Prayer, as Jesus taught us, is not just our speaking to God but letting God into us, letting God change us. Jesus taught us to pray "Give us this day our daily bread" so that WE could grow eyes to see what is truly necessary and enough for a good & godly life . . . so that we would grow our spirit of gratitude as we see all that we have as gift from God . . . so that we would grow in trusting God and freeing ourselves from needless and life-draining worry . . . and so that we would be aware of the hurts and needs of others and grow hearts that are as generous as "Our Father." Yes, there truly are a lot of ingredients in that prayer for our daily bread. Feast on the many flavors and denseness of this prayer this week. Receive it from the hands of Jesus, who we receive as bread at the altar, who we call the Bread of Life, and the One who held nothing back so that we might be the salt, the light and the yeast for God's unfolding kingdom. Amen.

Linda M Alessandri 8/26/16

ENDNOTES

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1. Martin Luther, The Small Catechism: The Lord's Prayer, the Fourth Petition.
 2. Charles Henrickson, "Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread" (Sermon on the Lord's Prayer) Posted on April 2, 2014 <http://steadfastlutherans.org>.
 3. Henrickson
 4. Martin Luther, The Small Catechism: The Lord's Prayer, the Fourth Petition.