

"Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread"

One of my favorite cities to visit in the United States is San Francisco. Have you been there? It's beautiful. My wife and I honeymooned there over twenty years ago and since then, I've had to good fortune to visit a few times. I love the landmarks- the Golden Gate Bridge, the Bay Bridge, the cable cars, Alcatraz, Telegraph Hill, and Fisherman's Wharf. It is there, Fisherman's Wharf, that each time I have visited, I couldn't wait to grab two of my San Francisco favorites and where I will head the first chance I get when I visit again. Those two favorites? Fresh steamed Dungeness Crab and clam chowder served in a sour-dough bread bowl. The crab speaks for itself. The chowder is delicious but there's something about eating it out of a steaming hot loaf of sourdough bread that is an amazing experience.

San Francisco is known for its sourdough. Long Island is known for its bagels. What about Wake Forest? Is there a particular bread that visitors can't wait to get a hold of when they come to town? Maybe a hushpuppy from *Shuckers* or cornbread from the *Pit* or even a biscuit from *Bojangles* is on that list. But like most places if you want a bagel, a pita, a tortilla, a soft pretzel, an english muffin or even a loaf of sourdough, it's available in one of the grocery stores or local restaurants. We have no shortage of choices when it comes to daily bread do we?

Bread is one of the world's oldest known prepared foods and is the world's most widely eaten food. It's such a staple in life that the word itself has become a metaphor. The person who makes the most money in a family is the "breadwinner." The land with the most fertile ground is the "breadbasket." In the Bible, bread is a synonym for food. Even if the menu consisted of grilled lamb with all the "fixins," the meal was still most likely described as eating bread.

What do you think of when you hear the word bread? A particular place like San Francisco or a particular food like pizza? Maybe the soft rock group from the '70's or if

you're on the *Atkins* Diet, you might think of all the weight you lost by avoiding it all together. But for many of us, when we think of bread, we think of our Lord Jesus Christ don't we? Jesus after all said, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger." At the last supper he took bread and after blessing it broke it and gave it to his disciples and said "take, eat; this is my body." And in the Lord's Prayer, he teaches us to pray for bread.

I don't know about you but this petition of the Lord's Prayer, "give us this day our daily bread," which is our focus tonight as we continue our Lenten series on The Lord's Prayer and Christ's Passion, is not one that makes me pause and reflect as much as the first three petitions. Our Father, "hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," I get. They seem really important don't they? We mix up our understanding of these and we might find ourselves separated from God forever..if you know what I mean. But "give us this day our daily bread?" What does this mean? Are we asking for some kind of divine intervention to keep the bread makers and the delivery truck drivers from going on strike?

Actually, in all seriousness, this petition is different because this one makes a move. Here's what I mean. The first three petitions really focus on our relationship with God. We ask that his name alone be holy in our lives; we ask that his kingdom come and that we lead more godly lives; we ask that he strengthen our faith and keep us firm in his word. And then the prayer makes an implicit move that not only includes our relationship with God (vertical) but our relationship with others (horizontal).

Just look at the words. Give us this day our daily bread. This shift is to the plural. Not give me but give us. This has community written all over it. But if you're like me, you probably don't really pray these words but routinely recite them, even then not giving them much thought. Am I right? Maybe it's because we generally don't associate being a redeemed child of God with our daily food intake. Faith in the crucified and resurrected Christ is not going to literally fill our stomachs with daily bread is it? Besides, as Luther says, "God provides bread even to the godless and rogues." Tell

someone who hasn't eaten in a week to just have more faith and they may tell you where to go. But for we Christians, faith is where we start. Our faith in Jesus Christ is where we always start.

Christ willingly died for you and me and through our faith we are forgiven people. I say this a lot and I'll say it again. This matters. Our relationship with God is restored. What a mind-blowing thing this is and it begs a question, I think. What does our new life in Christ mean in this world?

Well, the fourth petition of the Lord's prayer is one way that can help us answer. To pray for daily bread is not only an expression of gratitude for what we have but it's also a recognition that others who pray this prayer will go without unless someone helps. Jesus wants us to take care of each other. Even in the final minutes of his life as we read about in our Gospel reading tonight that message is clear. Jesus as he is literally dying tells John to take care of his mother. We too have a responsibility to take care of each other. God is the provider make no mistake. His world produces an abundance of food and goods but it's up to us, his people, to make sure those who are without are fed and clothed. I know this goes against the grain of our American way of thinking. We are quick to judge those without as lazy and irresponsible or just trying to "milk the system." The truth is some may be doing just that but it is not our place to make that decision. We must understand that just as God is gracious to us, we must be gracious to those who say they are in need and a good place to start is right here in our own community.

Many of you do just that by volunteering your time and resources participating in Brown Bag Ministry here at Hope or at other churches in the area. I know a few of you who graciously donate to the *Tri-Area Ministry Food Pantry* downtown. And let's not forget our wonderful HopeChest Ministry. Keep it up. And for those of you who may have thought about serving your neighbors in this capacity, know that there are many in need of your time and in need your help. This type of service might take you out of your

comfort zone and while it's certainly not a requirement, it is the kind of thing I think Jesus wants us to do.

The other day I ran across a posting blog posting from a west coast Bible professor that really put this petition of the Lord's Prayer in perspective for me and I hope it does the same for you. He writes: " People in the grip of poverty can pray- and grasp- the Lord's prayer, especially the line, "Give us this day our daily bread," in a way I can't, even though I've studied it in Greek and said it thousands of times in church. Jesus tells us to pray for daily bread. When was the last time you or I had to pray for daily bread? Not a meaningful job or a base hit or the right boyfriend or a B on an exam. Jesus takes us back to basics, somewhere I'm not willing to go.

Maybe you feel the same way. There are people -yes even in our community who desperately need our help but we have to be willing to go there. We don't do it out of guilt. We don't do it to make God happy or to get a bigger mansion in heaven We do it as a response to God's eternal gift to us.

The late missionary Mother Teresa said this of our bread of life, Jesus Christ. "When Jesus came into the world, he loved it so much that he gave his life for it. He wanted to satisfy our hunger for God. And what did he do? He made himself the bread of life. He became small, fragile, and defenseless for us. Bits of bread can be so small that even a baby can chew it, even a dying person can eat it."

My good brothers and sisters in Christ- sometimes we willingly have to go back to the basics. Christ is our spiritual bread of life and as a response to our generous God who gives us everything, we should be generous people who take care of each other. And helping someone who is down and out or hungry is one small way of doing just that.

Give us this day our daily bread. Lord, hear our prayer and grant is so. In Jesus Name. Amen.

