

The First Reading is from Exodus 16:4-5, 12-17:

¹ The whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt. ² In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. ³ The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death." ⁴ Then the Lord said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. ⁵ On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days." ⁶ So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "In the evening you will know that it was the Lord who brought you out of Egypt, ⁷ and in the morning you will see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?" ⁸ Moses also said, "You will know that it was the Lord when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the Lord." ⁹ Then Moses told Aaron, "Say to the entire Israelite community, 'Come before the Lord, for he has heard your grumbling.'" ¹⁰ While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the Lord appearing in the cloud. ¹¹ The Lord said to Moses, ¹² "I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, 'At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning, you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God.'" ¹³ That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning, there was a layer of dew around the camp. ¹⁴ When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. ¹⁵ When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat. ¹⁶ This is what the Lord has commanded: 'Everyone is to gather as much as they need. Take an omer for each person you have in your tent.'" ¹⁷ The Israelites did as they were told; some gathered much, some little.

The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. They whined, "Why didn't God let us die in comfort in Egypt where we had lamb stew and all the bread we could eat? Why did you bring us out here to starve to death?"

Who among us hasn't whined? Who among us hasn't complained that things are not as we wish them to be? Who among us doesn't prefer security and comfort, even if it comes at a cost?

The Israelites were not happy with their situation and the scapegoat was their leadership. They were hungry and tired as they wandered in the desert. They just wanted the comfort of what used to be. They wanted the comfort of knowing that their daily needs would be met.

This is a common prayer for many around the globe, for those whose next meal is always in question. We, too, may pray for our daily needs. And so we pray as Jesus taught us to pray. Listen for the word of God to us from the familiar words from the Gospel of Matthew, as we continue our exploration of the prayer Jesus taught us to pray.

The Second Reading is from Matthew 6:9-13:

⁹ "Pray then in this way:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
¹⁰ Your kingdom come.
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
¹¹ *Give us this day our daily bread.*
¹² And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
¹³ And do not bring us to the time of trial,
but rescue us from the evil one.

The Message is entitled, “Give Us.”

As we continue to explore the Lord’s Prayer today, we will be looking at the first of the three petitions. But, before we turn to this petition let’s recap where we have been.

“Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Notice the focus. These first two phrases are not about us, not about our complaints, not about our whining, not about our needs, not about our comfort. Just like the first four commandments, they are about God. The prayer Jesus taught us to pray begins with God and God’s vision for all of creation. We are included, by the grace of God as the Holy Spirit works in and through us, yet the first two lines are God centric. And given that we begin this prayer by saying “our,” we are committing our communal allegiance to this very God.

By praying this prayer, we are on the hook for making earth as it is in heaven by humbling our will to God’s will, more on this phrase after worship today in our Adult Faith Formation Class. This is an enormous commitment and we pray this every Sunday! We are on the hook for remembering that God is God and we are not, that God is sovereign and we are not. This is a humbling admission and we make it every Sunday. We are on the hook for living in reverence to God’s holiness and therefore God’s call for our lives to be holy as well. This is not easy given our propensity to revere our selves, our tribal values, or our particular ways as the one and only way. The opening lines of this prayer soar from heaven to earth and from earth to heaven. And it is only after we acknowledge all of this about God, that Jesus risks teaching us to pray for ourselves.

And what is our first need? Bread. I begin with the word at the end of this first petition. Jesus taught his disciples to pray “Give us this day our daily BREAD,” because finding enough to eat was a serious problem in first century Palestine. The vast majority of people subsisted day to day. One never knew if there would be enough for tomorrow. Bread was the basic staple of life in Palestine. I imagine that if Jesus had taught this prayer in an Asian context he might have taught his disciples to pray, “Give us this day our daily rice or in a South American context, “Give us this day our daily corn.”

I believe Jesus raised this need first to make a point. He is making it clear that the first priority in establishing God’s kingdom on earth is about meeting basic human needs, such as food and water. The kingdom of God fully realized on earth would mean a meal for anyone and everyone who was hungry; a meal for all of humanity.

Now I back up to the word “Daily.” It is the traditional translation for an unusual Greek word that occurs nowhere else in Greek literature independent of this text in Matthew and Luke. Based on linguistic scholarship the Greek word may mean “necessary,” “continual,” “for today,”

or even “for tomorrow.” Early church translators included these versions: “Give us our bread for tomorrow,” as well as “Give us the bread that is needful for each day.” It is the Latin Vulgate written in the early 5th century that gave us the word “daily.” Give us the bread that is sufficient for this day.

Now scholars postulate that Jesus was referencing the daily manna God rained down from heaven for the Israelites in the wilderness. Collecting the daily manna was an exercise in trust. And as the story unfolds, we learn that some Israelites didn’t trust in God’s provision. These Israelites collected more than enough and stored it for the next day just in case the bread from heaven did not rain down. Well, the excess collected in this way rotted overnight. Praying for daily bread is a basic prayer of trust, for in praying we acknowledge that our lives are dependent on God. It is only by God’s generous provision that our daily lives are possible.

Of course, this is counter-cultural thinking because we are schooled by our culture to be self-sufficient and autonomous. We are schooled to believe we don’t need anybody else. But, this is simply not true. When we have bread on our table it is because of a farmer who planted and harvested the grain, and a baker and packager, a transporter and a retailer and finally someone to purchase and bring it to the table. Of course, it was God who provided the soil, the water and the sunshine so that the crop would grow and could be harvested. Praying like this reminds us that what our culture teaches is false. Praying like this reminds us that we are dependent not independent from our God.

As we continue to unpack this phrase notice once again the language of this line is plural. The pronouns are “Us” and “Our”. Jesus did not teach us to pray, “Give ME this day MY daily bread,” or “Give ME this day more than enough bread so that I can store it up and save it for MY rainy days.” No, the pronouns are plural, communal. When we pray we are praying that all people, near and far, rich and poor have the basic sustenance for life.

James Mulholland tells this story from a mission trip he made to Honduras. He notes that Honduras is the second-poorest country in our hemisphere. He recalls that the group had taken several large plastic jars of peanut butter on their trip so that if their stomachs began to reject the local food, they would have a staple to sustain them. Needless to say, the peanut butter was eaten and so they tossed the first empty plastic container away. Within minutes of tossing the container they heard two women arguing loudly. The women had found the jar and were fighting over it. They wanted to use it to store rice or beans. This incident caused Mulholland to reflect, “What does it mean for us to pray, ‘Give us this day our daily bread.’ When some are fighting over our trash?”

This mission group realized that as Americans they had more than enough, especially given that they could afford the cost of the mission trip. Yet, their “more than enough” was also a responsibility to the greater whole. If we have “more than enough,” then the same holds true for us, even though we may not have been on a recent mission trip. To put our “more than enough” into perspective according to the globalrichlist.com an income of \$10,000 a year makes one richer than 87% of the world’s population. An income of \$50,000 a year makes one richer than 99% of the world’s population. Now the cost of living varies tremendously globally, but you get the idea that most of us in this sanctuary have far more than the majority of the world’s population.

Praying those plural pronouns in relationship to daily bread challenges us to consider how we might be part of the answer to someone else’s prayer for daily bread. As we feast at our

dinner tables today, how might we work to eradicate world hunger, given the staggering statistic which estimates that nearly 25,000 people starve to death daily? How are we to enact what we pray? First and foremost, we need to be mindful that some in our own community struggle to put food on the table every day. As a society, we now have school lunch programs, because we know a child cannot learn very well when their stomachs are growling. As a church we contribute to Redlands Family Services that assists struggling families through monthly contributions of staples as well as through their hunger walk every June. Every time we sit down at our tables, we need to remember that Jesus taught us to pray “us” and “our,” for on earth as it is heaven means no one would go hungry.

And that brings us to the first word of the petition: “Give.” Notice that we cannot force God; we must ask. Asking is a sign of humility. This prayer doesn’t say that we can take our daily bread or that we are entitled to our daily bread or that we can demand our daily bread. As if any of us would have the audacity to go to God and say, “God, you owe me my daily bread. Give me my daily bread now!” No, “give” is a petition, a request, a prayer of humility. We come with open palms beseeching a compassionate and merciful God. We simply ask, saying, “Give.” And God, in God’s infinite wisdom and tender mercy, gives us our daily provision.

“Give us this day our daily bread.” Our faith is communal. Our faith calls us to trust in God’s economy of abundance, rather than the human economy of scarcity. There is enough for everyone, it’s just that our economic systems and structures need some work to ensure distribution.

In this congregation, we are familiar with Bread for the World. An organization that encourages congregations to enact what they pray weekly through advocacy. Their website reminds us that nearly half of all child deaths worldwide are related to malnutrition and the numbers are staggering. The majority of impacted families live in countries in South Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and Central America. The need is immense, but there is also good news to share for global nutrition programs make a difference. More than 16 million FEWER children under the age of 5 are stunted from chronic malnutrition today than in 2012. Through education and advocacy Bread for the Word enacts the plural pronouns of this prayer daily. Through our offering of letters, we participate in their work.

Presbyterian Women through Cents-Ability, which originated in 1976, challenged women to collect two cents a meal to involve individuals and families in a corporate response to world hunger. The Presbyterian Hunger Program also raises funds for national and international projects to eradicate malnutrition and hunger. As a denomination, we collectively work together as an answer to this prayer.

This simple petition, “Give us this day our daily bread,” has incredible ramifications for our lives and the lives of others. Through these words we humbly confess that our lives are dependent on God. Through these words we commit to more than just a “me, myself and I” answer. Through these words we acknowledge that God’s provision is not just for some, but for all of humanity. Through these words we confess our responsibility to help those who hunger.

The question for me and I believe for all of us is this: “How might we be more intentional in addressing the issue of hunger locally and globally?” Maybe it is by placing money in a jar every time we eat and then contributing the money to hunger programs. Maybe it is buying extra canned goods when we go grocery shopping and then donating them to Redlands Family Services. Maybe it is sharing a meal with a neighbor in need.

I have never worried about whether or not there would be a next meal. My daily provision has always been more than enough. So, when I pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," I know that I need to ask for God's help to be more mindful of the pronouns, so I don't forget about those whose daily provision is not enough.

What about you? What about us?

What does God require of us as we pray, "Give us this day our daily bread"? What does God require of us? Amen.