

May 7, 2006
Our Daily Bread
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Two weeks ago, as we began our Lord's Prayer sermon series, Steve began by talking about the importance of understanding prayer as relational. He reminded us that at its best prayer is about impacting our relationships with others and with God more than it is about changing God. He then looked at the first petition of the Lord's Prayer and talked about our call to hallow God's name – to celebrate and give glory to him and our call to be in relationship with God as a young child loves and looks up to their parents. Prayer is relational and we are blessed to be in relationship with a loving and forgiving God.

Last week then we turned our attention to the next phrase, Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. As we looked at this text I challenged us to think about what it would truly mean to line our lives up with God's will for us and for the world. We closed then by remembering the good news that as we strive to live more and more in line with how God would have us live, the power of the risen Christ goes with us strengthening us and encouraging us.

And so today, on a day when we will celebrate communion as a community of faith, we turn to Jesus' prayer, Give us this day our daily bread. As we struggle with what it really means for us to pray that God will give us our daily bread let's let two questions guide us this morning. First of all, how do our lifestyles (our consumption and our waste) exhibit our faith in God? And secondly, what does it mean for us to call Jesus the bread of life in our journey through this world. Before we jump into those questions though, let me begin with a story.

This week in our Living the Questions class we were talking about Paul and his ministry and the conversation shifted to the ways in which we are responsible as Christians today to work for God's justice in the world. As we talked about our responsibility as humans to work for Justice and to be involved with God's work in the world, someone raised an interesting point. The gist of their observation was this – we talk a lot about the things that we're supposed to be doing as humans to make the world a better place, but sometimes it doesn't seem like God is doing as much as God could or should be doing to make the world a better place.

I was struck by the honesty of this observation. We talk so much about all of the things that we humans need to do to make the world a better place and this person was clearly struggling with God's role in it all. It makes sense really – we are merely humans, and our abilities are limited. So, why doesn't God intervene to make the world a better place, why doesn't God intervene to do the things that we're supposed to be doing? As we talked a little bit about this as a class I began to think about the story of God providing Manna in the wilderness – a story found in the book of Exodus.

After the Israelites had escaped Pharaoh's persecution in Egypt they were wandering in the wilderness. And as they continued to wander they began to display their very human characteristics – they began to whine, to moan, to complain. They even reached the point where they essentially cried out – this stinks, we were better off in slavery – I mean sure, we were slaves, but we had food! And with nothing to eat, nothing to satisfy their longings the grumbling amongst the people grew day by day until finally we reach a place where God intervenes. Hear these words from Exodus 16,

“¹¹The LORD spoke to Moses and said, ¹²‘I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, “At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.” ’

¹³ In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. ¹⁴When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. ¹⁵When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, ‘What is it?’ For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, ‘It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat. ¹⁶This is what the LORD has commanded: “Gather as much of it as each of you needs, an omer to a person according to the number of persons, all providing for those in their own tents.” ’ ¹⁷The Israelites did so, some gathering more, some less. ¹⁸But when they measured it with an omer, those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed. ¹⁹And Moses said to them, ‘Let no one leave any of it over until morning.’ ²⁰But they did not listen to Moses; some left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and became foul. And Moses was angry with them. ²¹Morning by morning they gathered it, as much as each needed; but when the sun grew hot, it melted.”

In this story God provides daily bread. But God warns, don’t take too much, don’t be greedy, don’t plan to have leftovers because it will just go bad by morning. The Israelites wandering in the wilderness were a community disconnected from others and this wilderness was a barren desert, a place where there was no chance of life growing, and so God intervened, providing the gift of manna, of bread. This story was likely the motivating force behind Jesus’ petition in the Lord’s Prayer. Give us this day our daily

bread would not have been merely a petition asking God for food. Rather Jesus' prayer for daily bread was a prayer in two parts. The first being that God would provide the needed nourishment and the second being that the community might be faithful to understand that God provides bread daily so that there isn't a need to hoard, to waste, to be selfish. When we pray asking God for our daily bread we should be saying the same – that we trust God will provide our daily bread and that we commit not to be wasteful.

The world today is much different than it was when the Israelites received the bread from heaven, the Manna in the wilderness. We are much more interconnected as world, especially in developed countries like the United States. We are able to go to the grocery store and get avocados from Mexico, olive oil from the Mediterranean, and fresh fruit from the Pacific Northwest without even having to think about where it came from or how it got to us. And as we shop, we always buy plenty, making sure that our fridges are stocked for the week. Then one of two things is likely to happen. We are likely to have bought too much and so by weeks end it has spoiled and we must through it away. Or, we are likely to overeat, buying and eating lots of things that aren't good for us, that we don't need. Eating to medicate, eating to escape, eating just because we're bored, these are, in many ways habits unique to western culture.

These two trends, our wastefulness and our over consumption are not just hunches that this preacher has. There are some pretty shocking statistics that illustrate what is going on in the world today. Our consumption patterns have created systems in the world that negatively affect millions of people every year. Hear these statistics... More than 840 million people in the world are malnourished – not getting enough of what they need. Six million children under the age of 5 die every year as a result of hunger. Every

country in the world has the potential of growing enough food to feed itself, but 54 nations currently do not produce enough food to feed their populations, nor can they afford to import the necessary commodities to make up the gap.

This last fact is shocking – every country in the world has the potential of growing enough food to feed itself, but 54 countries are not able to. This takes me back to the question from last Monday night, why isn't God doing more to intervene in the world. So, let's take a minute to go back to the stories of creation in Genesis so we can be reminded of two things – 1) that God created the world and everything that was in it and saw that it was good. 2) God gave humanity dominion over all the earth, the responsibility to care for creation and to be good stewards.

God created the world and provided global systems by which food could be provided. However, as we human beings were supposed to be caring for that potential and caring for one another, we created systems of inequality that leave people hungry all the time. God has done God's work through creation and revelation, and God seeks to continue working through us, God's creation in the world today.

But, let's take a minute and look at the second of the two global food trends I mentioned a minute ago – our use of food as a culture to self-medicate, to escape, to be entertained. While these things are contributing to the hunger of others there is another issue here too. Studies continue to find that Americans are increasingly overweight. We hear it on the news all the time – childhood obesity, juvenile diabetes, adult onset diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke – all of these problems can be directly related to the amount of and quality of food that we consume.

Now, please hear me, I'm not trying to accuse, I'm just as guilty as anyone else when it comes to spending and eating habits, but we need to become aware of the impact our decisions have and find ways to change them. The reality is this, our global economic systems have created a world where some are made ill and die because of a lack of food and others are made ill and die because of over consumption. I feel pretty confident in saying that neither of these scenarios is God's will for this earth and for life on it!

And so the bottom line is this – our food consumption habits and patterns are definitely spiritual issues. What does it say about our faith in God when we pray for our daily bread and then buy food in bulk that clogs our arteries, adds inches to our waistlines, and furthers systems of global economic injustice? Give us this day our daily bread... What if we began to look at this phrase as Haley and Lindsey put it in the version of the Lord's Prayer that we prayed – *Give us this day our physical and spiritual sustenance*. Help us consume and experience the things today that we need to make it through today so that others can have their physical and spiritual needs met as well.

When we back up to last week's section of the Lord's Prayer – our hope for God's will to be done – we are challenged to rethink our patterns of consumption. There are a variety of ways for us to begin making small changes in our consumption patterns – we can eat vegetarian, buy organic and fair trade, simply consume less! And we can also use the resources that we have to educate ourselves and support ministries that fight against hunger.

This coming weekend, a dozen or so youth are committing to go 30 hours without eating as we participate in the 30-hour famine lock-in. We will do devotionals on food

and hunger issues as they relate to spirituality, we will have a speaker from the Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest Indiana, we will serve a meal at the State Street Center and we will talk about what it means for us to be stewards of what God has given us. An aspect of this lock-in is also to raise funds for World Vision an organization that works to battle global hunger. And so if you're looking for a way to begin making a difference I would encourage you to make a donation to support these youth – a dime an hour, a dollar an hour, a flat rate donation of some kind – anything you can give to support their efforts and to work to realign all of our lives with God's will as we pray for and receive the gifts of our daily bread.

In addition to the gift of manna from heaven we as Christians have another powerful metaphor about sustenance and food – we refer to and celebrate Jesus as the Bread of Life. And so as we prepare to close today and begin to prepare for communion, let's take just a minute to tie these metaphors together. When we pray the Lord's Prayer we are asking that we might be given our daily bread. At the same time we celebrate Jesus as the bread of life. Let us never forget, that the things we need to sustain us through life are more than simply our physical needs.

As we move through our days seeking to become more and more aware of the injustice that exists when it comes to the distribution and consumption of food, the injustice that keeps so many from receiving their daily bread, let us always lean on and rely on the bread of life – Jesus who came into the human situation and showed us what it looks like to live in relationship with God and with others. Let us always remember that God has created this world and that God called and continues to call it good – even when we human beings make decisions that distort and damage creation. And so let us always

remember the story from Exodus of God's gift of manna – and God's call to the Israelites to not hoard it, to not consume too much of it, to not consume too little of it. And let us always thank God for the gifts of this physical nourishment and let us always rely on Jesus, the true source of our spiritual nourishment. When we do this, our prayers for daily bread can become prayers that all of creation will have their daily bread and that all of creation might be sustained by Jesus, the bread of life.