

**Give Us This Day our Daily Bread**  
*Sermon by Rev. Aaron Fulp-Eickstaedt*  
*Immanuel Presbyterian Church, McLean VA*  
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*Deuteronomy 8:3, Mark 8:14-21, John 6:41-51*

Today we continue our study of the Lord's Prayer by looking together at the petition, "*Give us this day our daily bread.*" Up to this point in the prayer Jesus taught his disciples, the emphasis has been on God: Your name be hallowed, Your kingdom come, Your will be done. Now the emphasis turns to something very human: the need for sustenance, the importance of one's bodily need for food being met on a daily basis.

In the Hebrew scripture, the iconic story of God's provision of food comes in the book of Exodus. The people have just escaped from Egypt and are wandering, hungry, in the wilderness. They grumble and complain that Moses and Aaron have led them out into the desert to starve. Then God says to Moses, "*I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for the day. In this way I will test them to see if they follow my instructions.*"

The next morning, after the morning dew has evaporated, there is a thin flaky substance on the ground. The people ask, "What is it?" The Hebrew word for that question is *manna*. Moses replies that it is the bread that God has provided for them and that they shouldn't try to keep any of it until the next morning. Some of them disregard the instructions and the manna they try to keep goes bad. It gets worms in it.

In the short passage I am about to read from Deuteronomy 8:3, the earlier episode of the manna is recalled for the people as they stand on the verge of entering into the Promised Land. Listen for the lesson the people are supposed to learn from the manna. *Read Deuteronomy here.*

Our second lesson comes from Mark 8:14-21. This is one of my favorite passages of scripture, because it depicts the disciples as embarrassingly human - so much like you and me. Jesus and the twelve are in a boat traveling across the Sea of Galilee. Jesus has just, for the second time, fed several thousand hungry people with just a few loaves of bread. But the disciples don't seem to have learned the lesson of God's provision. *Read Mark here.*

Our third lesson is from the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of John's gospel, after John's account of the feeding of the 5,000. Jesus has told the crowds that he is the bread that came down from heaven, and the crowds, who are metaphorically challenged, can't grasp what he is trying to tell them. In my reading, he is telling them that he has come out to flesh out God's love and provision. Embodied love is a reality that is in some mysterious way stronger and even more abiding than death. I pick up with the 48<sup>th</sup> verse. *Read John 6 here.*

This past Thursday evening, at a gathering in the home of some members of my wife Judith's church, I had the opportunity to meet Daniel Karlake. Karlake is the director of a new documentary

film project called, “*Every Three Seconds...*”<sup>1</sup> After some informal chit-chat, Karslake related to us how he got started on the project.

A couple of years ago, he was at church with his parent on a summer Sunday in Chataqua. He wasn't feeling all that engaged, he didn't particularly want to be there. But then something the preacher said in his sermon grabbed him and wouldn't let him go.

In his sermon, the preacher said something along these lines. “Every three seconds throughout the world, a person dies of the consequences of extreme poverty. Usually this person is a child, and typically he or she dies from hunger or from a preventable disease. The real tragedy is, for the first time in the history of the world, we have the means to address this. We have more than enough food on the planet for everyone, we have the technology at our disposal to get food and medicine into people's hands, and yet 30,000 people a day, 10.5 million people a year die from the consequences of extreme poverty.

Not believing the statistics at first, Karslake went to research them and found they were indeed true. Then he set about to answer the questions, “Why?” and “What can be done about it?” The “why” has a lot to do with two things, he maintains. First, because the statistics are so staggering the problem seems insurmountable. Second, and more importantly, many of us in the Northern Hemisphere are so far beyond enough, we have such a distorted relationship with what constitutes “enough” in our own lives, that we can't imagine living with less. We live in such abundance that we think we absolutely have to have this new toy or that new dress, this new car or that new place. Many of us have never experienced in our own bodies (or it has been a long time since we have), what real hunger or real poverty is. So we don't feel any meaningful connection to those 30,000 people a day who are dying and we don't have the strength of will to help them.

As I listened to Karslake talk, the fact that I was going to be preaching today on “Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread” was not lost on me. What does it mean to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread,” in a world where 30,000 people a day to die because their basic necessities are not getting met, even though there are more than enough resources to go around?

I think we might benefit from looking at the petition a piece at a time, beginning with the word *Give*. To pray, “*Give* us this day,” is to say with our mouths a truth that doesn't always register in our heads and in our hearts. It is to acknowledge that everything, everything, everything that we have is a gift from God. That's the lesson of the manna the Hebrews needed to learn, by the way. It is a message that is about far more than food.

It is all too easy for us to lapse into thinking that we somehow deserve all that we have. After all, we tell ourselves, we worked hard, we applied ourselves, we have this or that coming to us, we are entitled to it. (I have a friend who told me that she knew somebody at work who always said, “I just want what I deserve!” And she thought, “No, no you really don't.”) But even as we voice words like “I want what I deserve” or “I am entitled to this” somewhere in our gut we know there is something not quite true about them. We know instinctively that there are people in the world who don't have what we have, through no fault of their own. They were simply born to different parents, in different circumstances, or in a different part of the world.

The theological word for God's giving is *grace*. Frederick Buechner, the great Presbyterian author and pastor, writes of the word grace:

*Grace is something you can never get but only be given. There's no way to earn it or deserve it or bring it about anymore than you can deserve the taste of raspberries and cream or earn good looks or bring about your own birth.*

*A good sleep is grace and so are good dreams. Most tears are grace. The smell of rain is grace. Somebody loving you is grace.*<sup>2</sup>

There is a reason why we call praying before a meal "saying grace." To do so is to acknowledge that God is the giver. It is to realize that our basic necessities being met is not a foregone conclusion but a gift. It is a gift to which the appropriate response is gratitude and not a sense of entitlement.

So what about the next word in the prayer? What about *Us*? Give *us* this day our daily bread. If the word *Give* ought to lead us to gratitude as opposed to entitlement, then the word *us* should lead us to a sense of connection rather than isolation. The question that it raises is, "Who is a part of *us*?" Especially in a world where 30,000 people a day die due to a lack of basic necessities, even though the world has more than enough resources to go around.

To me, the heart of the Christian gospel centers in the way it breaks open our narrow view of who belongs to us. That doesn't mean that Jesus' message of embracing the outcast and tearing down walls of division hasn't been twisted over the centuries by his followers into exclusivism of one sort or another. But at its very core, the good news that we hear at Christmas is about a great joy for how many people? For *all* people. The good news that we hear in the Gospel of John is about God's love for what section of the world? The *whole* world, especially the most vulnerable among us. There is no us and them. There is only us.

One of the wonders of Daniel Karlake's film project is the way that it identifies five people who are living as if that is true and doing something about it. One of them is a little seven-year old boy in England named Charlie Simpson. Right after the earthquake in Haiti, Charlie went to his parents and told them that he wanted to do something to help the children in Haiti. He said, "You know, it just doesn't seem fair that I am here in England happy and healthy with both of my parents and there are so many children in Haiti who have lost their parents. I want to do something about this." He decided he wanted to raise money for UNICEF. To their credit his parents didn't tell him, "Well, that's nice Charlie. Here, we'll throw in a few pounds for UNICEF." Instead, they asked him how he would like to go about doing that. What was it that he liked to do that he might use to raise money? He told them, "Well, I love to ride my bike." So, together they decided to communicate through the miracle of the Internet that Charlie would ride his bike around his local park as many times a possible to get donations towards UNICEF. Through the Internet, his quest was advertised and within a day Charlie raised well more than his goal of 500 pounds. To-date, he has raised 210,000 pounds for UNICEF. A seven-year old boy!<sup>3</sup>

What about the next section of the petition? Give us *this day* our daily bread. When I hear those words I think about the trite little saying - and I think it maybe is trite - "Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, today is a gift. That's why they call it the present."<sup>4</sup>

I think about all of the times I've spent in my life either dwelling on the past or worrying about the future and in the process missing what I could do in the present. To pray "Give us this day our daily bread," doesn't mean we can't learn from the past and that we can't plan for the future. It is to take responsibility for the day and what we can do in the present.

When I meet with couples for premarital counseling one of the things we talk about is finances. I give them the rule of thumb that John Wesley had for dealing with finances. He asserted that you should strive to live off of eighty percent of your income, save ten percent of your income, and give ten percent of your income away. Now Wesley might have said to give it to the church, I just say to give it away, because it helps us to think about giving beyond the walls of a congregation. Either way, it is a good challenge, isn't it?

Now this is not to say that there is not a place for planning for the future. That's what the saving part is about. So, financial planners out there, rest easy. There is a reason we have the story in Genesis about Joseph in the court of Pharaoh having the dream of the seven fat cows and the seven lean cows, the seven fat years and the seven lean years. There is wisdom in setting aside something for times when things won't seem so abundant. But we, who live in such abundance, can't forget, in the process, to share. And we can't forget just how important it is to think about how much is enough.

So then, to wrap up, what about *our daily bread*? Let me share two stories.

One of them comes from Daniel Karlake. He told us that he was with a woman, an aid worker, in Malawi as he was doing research on his Every Three Seconds film project. The woman is Scottish, probably in her late twenties or early thirties. As he was visiting with her, Karlake posed this question. "Most people who come here go back to their home country after six months or a year. You've been here for more than two years. When are you going to go back home?"

She responded, "I'm not going to go back." He said, "Really?" She replied, "Well, I was living in San Diego, and I had a good friend who decided to get breast enhancement surgery, and then when she finished with that, she wasn't quite happy and she decided she better have a tummy tuck to match. When she told me after that surgery that she was going to get a nose job, I started to think about how out of whack our priorities are. I knew I had to get out of there before I started thinking the same way."

She went on to tell him, "The wonderful thing about living here in Malawi is that at the end of the day, people just sit around and chat. They connect. They tell stories. Every day, at the end of the day, they chat." (Those of us who have been to Peru know what that is like. The pace of life is different, the priorities are different.) Even though they possess much less in the way of material resources than we have, they have a better sense of what is really important in life.

Now that is one person's experience. Somebody else's might be different. But this does make me think about how not all of our daily bread needs have to do with physical food. Sometimes the daily bread we need and seek is more about human connection. Oh, that physical need for bread has to get met, but after those physical needs are met - there is an even deeper spiritual need to really connect.

It has been an interesting summer at our house, because Judith and I have had a little bit of the experience of the empty nest, because the girls have been off on mission trips. And just this past week, they were both at the Presbyterian Youth Triennium, the big conference for youth that happens every three years at Purdue. They just arrived home late last night.

What I think happens at these conferences and on these mission trips is that a sort of bread is provided that is more than physical bread. Youth, and people of all ages really, have a hunger to live lives of meaning and connection. And when the kids get back from Triennium or a mission trip, and they are so full - so full of hope, so full of a desire to make a difference, so full of a sense of having done something important - I know they have found something. They have found the Bread of Life. And it will lead them to feed other people and to do it in Jesus' name.

*Amen.*

Aaron D. Fulp-Eickstaedt

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<sup>1</sup>*Every Three Seconds...* is a documentary film project by Daniel Karlake. References to the project and Karlake's words come from my memory of a talk he gave at the home of a member of Trinity Presbyterian Church seeking to raise money for the production.

<sup>2</sup> Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker's ABC* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1973, 1993), p. 38.

<sup>3</sup> For more information on Charlie Simpson, see his webpage <http://www.justgiving.com/CharlieSimpson-HAITI>

<sup>4</sup> I'm not sure who first said this, but you can find this saying any number of places.