



## **“Teach Us to Pray: Our Daily Bread”**

September 15, 2019

Exodus 16.1-7a and Luke 9.10-17

Covenant Presbyterian Church,

Madison WI

Rev. Charlie Berthoud

A reading from Exodus 16

The whole congregation of the Israelites set out from Elim; and Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. <sup>2</sup>The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. <sup>3</sup>The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”

<sup>4</sup>Then the Lord said to Moses, “I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not. <sup>5</sup>On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days.” <sup>6</sup>So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “In the evening you shall know that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, <sup>7</sup>and in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your complaining against the Lord.

Thanks be to God for the words of Scripture. Amen.

\* \* \* \* \*

For 65 years the people of Covenant have been on the journey of faith. Last week, we celebrated our journey of faith, with our 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a congregation.



God has sustained us on that journey. God has given us our daily bread on that journey. Thankfully, the people who have come before us were wise enough and humble enough to receive the daily bread that God offered.

The first scripture reading tells us of the people of Israel on the journey of faith, from slavery to freedom, from familiar to unfamiliar, from the old life to a new life. On the journey, God sustained them, with daily bread, in the form of what was known as manna.

Manna was a flaky white substance, which according to the Bible tasted like “wafers made with honey” (Exod. 16.31) or cakes made with oil (Num 11.8).

And it was enough.

They were wise enough and humble enough to receive what God offered them, at least most of the time they were.

It was a long journey through the wilderness. And if you read the biblical book of Exodus, you’ll know that the journey was hard, filled with challenges.

Sometimes the people got scared and they wanted to go back. With very selective memory, they longed for the supposedly good old days in Egypt, forgetting that they were enslaved.

But with the patient persistence of God and with the courage of their leaders who trusted in the promises of God, they continued through the wilderness, toward the promised land, with God providing their daily bread, in the form of manna.

And the text tells us that God provides enough for each day with a double dose on the day before the Sabbath. Some people are fearful or distrustful and they try to gather more than a one-day supply, but when they did, it rotted.

God provided enough.

God provided enough, and they were wise enough and humble enough to receive what God offered, to sustain them on the journey.

This leads us to our gospel reading from Luke, where we see another instance of God providing enough daily bread, actually more than enough.

The account of the feeding of the 5000 appears in all four gospels, with slight variations. Here in Luke’s telling, we see that Jesus has been teaching about the Kingdom of God. And this is yet another biblical account reminding us that we are on this journey together, that we need each other. Listen for God’s word.

On their return the apostles told Jesus all they had done. He took them with him and withdrew privately to a city called Bethsaida. When the crowds found out about it, they followed him; and he welcomed them, and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed to be cured.

The day was drawing to a close, and the twelve came to Jesus and said, “Send the crowd away, so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside, to lodge and get provisions; for we are here in a deserted place.” But he said to them, “You give them something to eat.” They said, “We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people.” For there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, “Make them sit down in groups of about fifty each.” They did so and made them all sit down. And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. And all ate and were filled. What was left over was gathered up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.

Thanks be to God.

This month we are focusing on the Lord’s Prayer—the prayer that Jesus gave to his disciples when they asked, “Teach us to pray.”

And today we have given Bibles to our first graders and fourth graders, so it makes sense to look at the biblical roots of the Lord’s Prayer.

There are two variations of the prayer in the Bible:

<p>Luke 11 Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial.”</p>	<p>Matthew 6 Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.</p>
--	---

From those two variations and from church tradition, we have the prayer that millions of Christians are saying today, all over the world.

The prayer begins with three affirmations about God, reminding us that God is holy and other.

And it concludes with three petitions about us, reminding us that we’re on the journey together: Give US our daily bread. Forgive US. Deliver US from evil. We need each other and we pray for and with each other.

### Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread;  
and forgive us our debts  
as we forgive our debtors;  
and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
and the power,  
and the glory, forever. Amen.

We are inviting everyone to pray this prayer at least once a day this month.

I put together a Lord's Prayer resource sheet, with both biblical texts, along with a few variations of the prayer. Hard copies are available on the table.

Our focus for today is Give us our daily bread.

So what is our daily bread?

Broadly speaking there are two ways that Christians have understood the phrase daily bread: literally and spiritually

Most of us here at Covenant don't really know the reality of hunger, of not knowing where our next meal is coming from.

According to Bread for the World, every year, 2.6 million children die as a result of hunger-related causes. In the U.S., nearly 16 million children — one in five — live in households that struggle to put food on the table.

I believe it's God's will that everyone have enough to eat. We've just failed to make it happen. And so when we pray "give us our daily bread," we're not just praying for our own stomachs to be filled, but for everyone's stomachs to be filled. Not over-filled, just filled.

And we're praying for hungry people—in South Sudan, in Bahamas, and even here in Madison.

Friday night, several Covenant people served a meal of fried chicken, mashed potatoes, salad, and cookies to the guests at the Grace Episcopal Church men's shelter.

I'm glad to be part of a church where we are trying to feed hungry people. We pray and we act.

But praying for our daily bread isn't just about food in our stomachs. It is also asking God to give us what we really need, in a spiritual sense—a sense of peace and vision and courage, a sense of God with us.

I believe God offers us this daily bread. God offers us peace, vision, and courage. But we don't always sit down and eat.

One way of many ways God feeds us is with Scripture and prayer.

When we read our Bibles and say our prayers, we find focus, meaning, purpose in life. We are fed and given strength for the journey.

Sadly, we too often fail to take advantage of God's daily bread, and instead we fill ourselves with nonsense and distraction. We fill ourselves with spiritual junk food. And too much junk food is dangerous.

Did you hear about the kid who went blind after eating only junk food? I'm not making this up. A report came out recently about a teenager who ate French fries, potato chips, and white bread, and almost nothing else. He went to the doctor for fatigue and other issues about a year ago, and now he's blind. <https://www.cnn.com/2019/09/03/health/poor-diet-blindness-scli-intl/index.html>

I have nothing against potato chips or French fries. I've eaten both in the past week, but in small amounts.

We need healthy things, good things along with whatever "junk" we consume.

So in terms of your reading, listening, and watching, how much of that is junk?

It's OK to take a break and watch a bad movie or read a snarky commentary article or spend time poking around on social media once in a while, but we can live on such things.

We need a regular supply the good nutrition, of good and healthy and decent things, things that God provides on a consistent basis.

So we encourage, invite, cajole, remind you to feed your soul with prayer and Scripture, with worship and fellowship, with God's love.

What are your daily routines?

What are the things you do every day?

Think about tomorrow.... Where can you make time, maybe just a few minutes to pray the Lord's Prayer and read at least a little from your Bible?

Hopefully we get a good serving of God's food every Sunday here at church, but I think we all need more regular feeding during the week to keep our spirits in shape, to keep ourselves faithful.

If we want to really live and thrive as God's people, we need more than on occasional big doses.

I grew up going to church, basically because my mom told me that I had to go. I drifted away in high school. In college, I started asking questions about God, about Christianity, and about life. I realized that I wanted to explore the Christian life and grow.

I gradually came to the conclusion that I needed to spend time reading my Bible.

So I had it all figured out. I was on vacation at the beach in Massachusetts, and I took my Bible that I got in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade to a remote and beautiful spot. I sat up a chair and looked at the ocean, and then I opened my Bible and started to read.

I wasn't really sure where to start, so I flipped around. I tried thumbing through the pages and sticking my finger in randomly.

Nothing. I had expected a sudden revelation, a profound insight, a lightening bolt of God's presence. But nothing.

At some point I realized that what I really needed was not a one-and-done experience with God, but slow and steady daily diet.

God didn't give the Israelites a truck load of food and send them on their way. God fed them every day, little by little.

Someone who is overweight or unhealthy from eating only French fries isn't going to get healthy by eating only salad for one day.

Someone who is out of shape isn't going to become physically fit with an 8 hour workout at the gym.

To be healthy in body or in spirit, we need to feed ourselves every day with good things. Small doses, on a regular basis, day after day.

The good news is that God gives us manna every day. All we need to do is be wise and humble enough to receive it. Amen.

