

Give Us Today Our Daily Bread

Series: Teach us to Pray

Date: 17 May 2020, 5th Sunday after Easter

Location: St George's Online

Texts: Deuteronomy 8:1-18; Matthew 14:13-21

As many of you know my parents were missionaries. They were from, what used to be called, a “faith based” mission. That meant that the mission didn’t pay them a salary. They had to raise money to live on themselves. The thing was, they weren't meant to ask for financial support. Instead, they would share with churches about their work, and pray that God would provide what they needed. I know that things sometimes were tight. But we never were in need.

Coronavirus has put millions of people out of work in Australia and around the world. I know that some of our own church family have lost their jobs or are facing that prospect. The future looks uncertain, particularly for those of you from overseas. Governments are scrambling to provide assistance for people and keep their economies going. But even before coronavirus, putting food on the table each day is a huge struggle for many around the world and in our community. I know that for some of you, battling finances, illness, mental health, just getting through the day is a challenge.

How are we to face the uncertainty and fragility of life? It’s a question for all of us, whatever your religious persuasion. Today we’re looking at the 4th petition in the Lord’s Prayer. *Give us today our daily bread*. I want to suggest that this prayer is just what we need when it comes to meeting the uncertainty we all face at the moment. Let’s slow down and meditate on what this prayer can teach us.

Give us.

These words remind us that God is our provider. We often come to prayer full of fear and worry. But the first 3 petitions of the Lord’s Prayer lift our eyes off ourselves and focus them on God: his greatness and glory, his plans and purposes. He is the source of all that is good. He loves us and takes care of us. He will provide us what we need. So Jesus says *don’t worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. ... Your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*¹

So much of our world runs on the assumption that resources are scarce, so you have to compete to survive. But God owns all the riches of heaven and earth. We live by his generous hand. *The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it* sings the Psalmist. The

¹ Matthew 6.25-34

Lord owns the cattle on a thousand hills.² And he promises he will provide. So Jesus says to us, *Ask, and it will be given to you.*³

This is true even in prosperity. Deuteronomy 8 warns us that the danger of wealth is that you will become proud and forget God.

You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth...⁴

The prayer, *Give us today our daily bread*, not only asks God to provide, it also reminds us to give thanks to God for what he has provided and acknowledge him as the one who provides all that we need and more.

Daily Bread

This phrase of course speaks of putting food on the table. But it’s meaning is wider. The 16th century theologian John Calvin writes that with this petition we ask God for **all** that our bodies need,

not only food and clothing, but also everything God perceives to be beneficial to us, that we may eat our daily bread in peace.

On the other hand this prayer is explicitly not for all we **want**.

The phrase “daily bread”, comes from Proverbs 30.8-9

give me neither poverty nor riches,
but give me only my daily bread.

Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you
and say, ‘Who is the LORD?’

Or I may become poor and steal,
and so dishonor the name of my God.

And so this is a prayer for contentment.

The words “daily bread”, Calvin says, are a “bridle” against our uncontrolled desire for fleeting things like pleasure, ostentation and other excesses that abundance can feed. Jesus tells us to ask in this prayer only what is sufficient for our need from day to day. We trust, “that as our Heavenly Father nourishes us today, he will not fail us tomorrow.”⁵ In this way the prayer, *Give us today our daily bread*, guards against greed. It reminds us to ask not for what we want, but what we need.

Our

So far we’ve been thinking about God’s provision for me as an individual, or maybe my family too. But the words **us** and **our** teach us this prayer is not just about my

² Psalm 24.1; Psalm 50:10

³ Matthew 7.7

⁴ Deuteronomy 8.17-18

⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, III.XX.44

need, it is also about my neighbour's need. We can ask the question, what is needed for my neighbour's daily bread? Martin Luther, another 16th century theologian, sees this petition as a prayer for a just and prosperous society. To pray, give us our daily bread, is to pray for the needs of all people to be met. It is to pray against "wanton exploitation" in business, trade and labour, which "crushes the poor and deprives them of their daily bread."⁶ We thank God for his provision through our governments. But we also pray for those around the world who are facing dire need. We pray for their governments, we pray for aid agencies, we pray for peace, for justice, for generosity.

As we pray for not only for our own but also our neighbour's daily bread, we may find that God moves us to be the answer to this prayer. As we receive from God's generous hand, so he calls us to be generous and willing to share. In 2 Corinthians St Paul urges the Christians in Corinth to give to the starving church in Jerusalem.

At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality.⁷

It's been a beautiful thing to see how Wellspring Anglican church just down the road has started the *Show Hope* campaign to care for students from the subcontinent who are stranded in Hobart, have lost their jobs and have little or no financial support from government or home. I'm delighted that some of you have been able to support this initiative. If you want to find out more talk to Karen. She volunteers giving meals on Tuesday evenings.

But there are lots of other ways that we can be the way God provides for others' needs. It may be financially. It may be a home cooked meal. It may be a phone call. It may be volunteering. As you pray this prayer, ask that God helps you see the needs around you and what you can do.

I confess I don't have the same faith my parents had. I'm very grateful to receive a stipend from the church. But I have seen God provide for us as a church in people, in resources and in his timing. One example that springs to mind is our restoration project. We took a step of faith late 2018 to engage contractors for the work, and then just before that Christmas our local MP Andrew Wilkie told us he had at last, after years of asking, secured \$1.6 million in Federal funding. God will provide for you too. Maybe not how you expect or how you want. But he will provide. So today, why don't you come to him, with all your needs and worries, and ask, *give us today our daily bread.*

⁶ Tim Keller, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God*, Hodder & Stoughton, 2014: 114

⁷ 2 Corinthians 8.14