

“THE LORD’S PRAYER – PRAYING FOR TODAY”

THE REV. VICTOR KIM

Matthew 6:11, Luke 24:28-31a

(10-03-21) Communion

Give us this day our daily bread. How many of you buy bread daily? It probably used to be a higher number, but we live in the era of Costco. You go to buy bread in a package that holds a minimum of 2 full loaves, often 3. Throw the extra into the freezer and thaw it out when you need it. Not daily bread, more like weekly, or even bi-weekly.

And this is a bit of a problem given what Jesus tells us to pray. How do we pray for daily bread when most of us have never been in a situation where daily bread was an issue? I’ve never been on the brink of starvation, I’ve never had to choose between buying groceries or paying a bill to keep my heat on. I remember some years back when I was on a mission trip to Malawi. My homestay hosts showed me where they kept their corn. It was a large circular pit in the ground with a lid. He opened the lid and showed me where they kept the corn. There wasn’t a lot of it left. I said, what happens when you eat all the corn? We go hungry until the next harvest, was the answer. What I discovered was that Malawi, one of the poorest countries in the world, landlocked and without any natural resources to export, sold their corn on the export market. A country that couldn’t even feed its own people sold the very corn that was needed to keep people from starving. I couldn’t comprehend what it must have been like to come to the end of the corn in that pit, knowing that it was going to be a tough time until the next harvest came.

That kind of daily need is hard for people like us to understand. Remember when the pandemic first hit? Remember the people buying up toilet paper and hand sanitizer? Remember all the flats of water being purchased? We live in a land of plenty, of abundance, where even faced with a pandemic, all we need to do is go out and get the stuff we need. How do we pray for daily bread when we have so much?

When the people of Israel were wandering in the desert, they complained to Moses that they were dying of hunger and that it would have been better if they had stayed in Egypt. Hearing their complaint, God gave the people manna, which Moses called the bread that the Lord had given to the people to eat, the bread from heaven if you will. But the thing with manna was that you could only gather enough for one day and only enough for each person. If you tried to hoard the manna, it would go rotten with maggots and stink. **It was God’s way of reminding the people that they needed to depend on God each day, not only when they ran out of food.**

As I said, it’s hard to pray, give us this day our daily bread, when most of us have so much.

Our problem isn't that we don't have enough bread, it's that we have too much of it. If anything, our prayers should help us to eat less bread. Maybe when Jesus taught his disciples this prayer for the first time the reality of needing daily bread was much more immediate than it is for us. But I suspect that Jesus wasn't really only teaching this prayer so that people would be depending on God for a daily meal. There's more to it than that.

Give us this day, give us today, our daily bread. **It's really more about expressing our daily need for God, perhaps not in the provision of a meal, but in the recognition that we are not our own but that we are God's.** We are God's people, God's beloved creation, and without our Creator, without God, we are not whole, we are not complete. We talked about the work of prayer being to bend our lives toward God. **Praying this prayer, praying for daily bread, is part of the practice of bending, shaping our lives and our living in a way that acknowledges God in our lives and in the way we live our lives, every part of our lives.**

Have you heard about Squid Game? Some of you have. It's the latest thing on Netflix, the most watched non-English program ever on Netflix and probably will be the most watched program period. It's a drama series from Korea and it's the talk of the entertainment world. I am not going to recommend that you watch it, but some of you will. You've been warned. Its violent, very violent and graphic. But like other recent movies and productions from Korea, such as the Academy Award winning film Parasite, Squid Game has reached a level of popularity partially because of its message. It's a scathing social commentary on the gap between the rich and the poor and the desperation that the poor too often experience in our culture.

Several hundred extremely poor people, people who have debts that they just can't afford to pay, those willing even to sell their organs for money, are offered a chance to win an unthinkable amount of money, around 50 million Canadian dollars. All they have to do is to win a series of children's games. What the contestants quickly realize is that if they lose, they die. If there is going to be a winner, it will be because every other contestant will have been killed because they lost the game. After the shock of the first game, when hundreds of contestants are violently killed, the remaining players vote to end the game and are sent back home. But soon enough we see how desperate their lives are, mired in debt, stuck in poverty, seemingly with no hope and no opportunity to escape the wretched existence they face. One character bluntly says that his life in the real world is just a living hell. He would rather go back to the game and risk his life for the money than just live his life going from day to day living from hand to mouth. And so just about all the contestants decide to return to the game, knowing that every one of them except one, will be killed, but deciding that it's better to die trying to get rich than to die knowing that you never will.

It's a social commentary about the desperation of too many people in our society, whether it's in Korea or on the border between the US and Mexico, in Malawi or even here in the lower

mainland, a place of unimaginable wealth and affluence. But we know that the affluence is not equally shared, in fact it's about as unequally distributed as possible. You don't need me to repeat the numbers, about how a tiny percent of people have far too much wealth and how far too many others don't have nearly enough.

If prayer is the act of bending our lives toward God, then when we pray, give us this day, give us today our daily bread, **it's a matter of praying for a daily reminder, a daily provision of the recognition that we need God in our lives, that we are not self-sufficient, not if we want to live the lives that God has intended for us, not if we want to fill that God shaped hole in our hearts.** Part of that recognition of God's provision for our lives is to know that **we are not meant for only ourselves.** We understand God's intention for us when we recognize that we are not meant to live as individuals but as a community.

Give **us** this day **our** daily bread. The words are so clear but do we hear what we pray? **Give us, not give me, our daily bread, not my daily bread.** Jesus teaches us that as we pray we are praying that we are not our own and that we are not alone. Praying, give us this day our daily bread, is to pray that what God provides is not only meant for us alone, but must be shared, **it's not my bread, but our bread.** Will Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas write that our bread is not ours to hoard. Our bread belongs to our sisters and brothers. Bread is God's gift which, like so many other good gifts of God, we pervert by our selfishness. To pray, "Give us today our daily bread," is to radically re-examine ourselves, to acknowledge the claim that God has placed upon us through the gift of bread, **to admit the responsibility we have for our neighbour's need.** So as you learn to pray this prayer, note that you necessarily offer your life to others.... **Did we not warn you that it was dangerous to pray this prayer?**¹As first year seminary students we were encouraged, strongly encouraged, to attend the weekly chapel services that took place on Wednesdays at noon. Worship would be led by professors and students and would always include the sacrament of communion. We would come forward and take a piece of bread and dip it into the cup, what we came to know as intinction, sometimes referred to as grip it, rip it and dip it.

Now none of this was particularly surprising or new but it was what happened afterwards that really astonished this first year theology student. We would move into the large classrooms for a lunch following worship, then there were gatherings for smaller groups and presentations. As I came up to get my lunch, I was shocked to see that the bread for my sandwich was the same bread that had been used at the communion service earlier! The portion of the bread that had not been used for communion had been brought to the room and was being sliced into pieces for the sandwich. At first I thought it was sacrilegious. How can you use the bread that symbolizes the body of Christ broken for us as part of a ham and swiss sandwich? I could barely get the first delicious bite down my throat.

¹ William Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas, Lord, Teach Us – The Lord's Prayer and the Christian Life. p.76

But of course, when you think about it, it makes perfect sense. If our partaking of the body of Christ is only confined to the table, what good is that? **That same body, broken for us, must accompany us from the table into the world, into the daily lives we live, into a world full of hungry stomachs and lonely spirits.** But this is something we need to remember daily, not only once a week when we come to church and not only once every quarter when we come to the table to receive the bread and the cup. To pray for daily bread is to pray to be reminded daily of our need for God.

Two disciples on the road to Emmaus had been traveling all day with Jesus but it wasn't until they sat down for dinner and Jesus broke bread that they recognized that it was Jesus who had been with them. Breaking bread together, as we do today, not only with each other, but also with all Christians from every corner of the world on this World Communion Sunday, we recognize Jesus with us when we bread this bread and share in this cup.

But again, we do this only every three months. Perhaps we should do it more often, some churches celebrate the Lord's Supper every week. But think about it when you're at munch and mingle, when you eat a cookie or drink your coffee, just like the loaf of bread that went from the altar to the lunch table, the sacred goes with us into the secular, really because there's nothing that isn't sacred if it's part of God's creation, because God is present in every part of God's kingdom.

So what is it that you could do that would remind you daily of your need for God? Could it be our connection to the poor, to those in need around us? We may not come to the table on a daily basis, but we encounter need every day. **Pay attention, watch for those opportunities where the sacred can be woven into what we think is only secular, when the bread from the altar becomes the bread for our sandwiches.**

The table is ready friends, ready for those who will pray what Jesus taught us to pray, Give us today, our daily bread. May it be so for us all.

Thanks be to God, Amen!