

THE LORD'S PRAYER
THE PRAYER OF ENOUGH
A Sermon by Rev. Marci Glass
July 31, 2022



Luke 11:1-4

Jesus' Teaching on Prayer

11 One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." 2 He said to them, "When you pray, say: "Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. 3 Give us each day our daily bread. 4 Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.[d]"

1 Kings 17:8-16

8 Then the word of the Lord came to him: 9 "Go at once to Zarephath in the region of Sidon and stay there. I have directed a widow there to supply you with food." 10 So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, "Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?" 11 As she was going to get it, he called, "And bring me, please, a piece of bread."

12 "As surely as the Lord your God lives," she replied, "I don't have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die." 13 Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small loaf of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. 14 For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord sends rain on the land.'" 15 She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. 16 For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the Lord spoken by Elijah.

Our Lord's Prayer series continues today. Today we're exploring Give us this day our daily bread.

To have daily bread is a simple thing. It means to have enough food to eat, to sustain our life and our health, for each day. But we complicate that. Our whole economy is built on the notion that you don't

just need to buy bread for today. But you need 14 different kinds of bread, and you should probably buy it in bulk and store it in a large pantry.

Give us this day our daily bread is a subversive prayer in a world of conspicuous consumption.

Whenever I come back home from a trip, especially if I've been out of the country, or out in nature for an extended period, I'm most disoriented at the grocery store, especially if it is a big supermarket. If you want fruit, you don't just have the choice of what is in season. They've shipped things from all over so you can eat strawberries in December and apples in May. If you want crackers, there's a whole aisle for those. After a week of camping, the amount of choices in a grocery store is overwhelming for me. We have so much before us that it becomes hard to appreciate the idea of daily bread.

Have you ever experienced that overload? It is not just about food. It is the feeling I sometimes get when I turn on the TV, only to turn it off 20 minutes later after scrolling through every conceivable show on Netflix and not finding something to watch because there are too many things to watch.

It is the noise coming at us from competing voices in the news. We have access to more news stories today than we've ever had before. But somehow, we feel less thoughtful and knowledgeable about what is going on around us.

I'm not pining for the days when the world slowed down to listen to Walter Cronkite at the same time each night, exactly. Misinformation did not begin with cable news. But it does feel like some of our country's fracturing is related to having too much 'daily bread' in lots of ways.

In seminary, I had the privilege of traveling in the Middle East for 3 weeks. We traveled through Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Palestine, Israel, and Greece. Each day, I'd be invited to sit at a table in a restaurant, or the hotel, or someone's home, and food would be provided for me. I didn't order a meal for three weeks. It was just put before me each day. Some meals were fancy, most were simpler, but it was all good nutritious food and I got used to the gift of not worrying about deciding what I was going to eat. I recognize what a gift that daily bread was. It didn't magically appear. Someone had made plans to feed our entire group. People worked in kitchens, preparing food that farmers had raised. It was a gift on that trip to be fed, to not have to worry about what we were going to eat each day so that we could be present for the gift of each day.

To pray for our daily bread is, to some degree, to acknowledge that we are dependent on each other. We live in a world where there is a web of connection between us all. For us to have daily bread, we need farmers to plant wheat, and mills to grind flour, and bakers to knead the dough, watch it rise, and bake it. We need trucks to deliver the bread to the store, and people to ring us up at the cash register. We don't often notice the depth to which we are connected, to which we need each other.

And in a global economy, our connections span the globe. Our concerns do too. One of the things we've (hopefully) been reminded of since Covid appeared, is that the well-being of people in other countries, in other states, in other neighborhoods, is directly related to our own health and well-being. Give us this day our daily bread is a prayer for the world.

Jesus doesn't tell us to pray "give us this day bread for the next three years". We aren't instructed to ask, "give us this day more bread than anyone else has."

Give us this day, our daily bread.

It is a prayer for enough. And enough is hard for us to ask for in a world that tells us there is never enough.

This may be the most Bay Area illustration I could imagine for this part of the prayer, but did you catch the article in the paper last week about the Lagier Meredith vineyard in Napa? (This was shared with me by Cornel Barnett, a retired minister who worships with us. Thank goodness for clergy offering sermon illustrations to their colleagues, especially an entire week before the sermon is preached!)

In this story in the Chronicle, the headline read "Napa's latest vineyard deal comes with a shocking price tag: \$0".¹ They were handing over control of the vineyard to one of their employees, who will make wine under a new label. They said, "we could have cashed out. We know what it's worth, ballpark, but we also know we didn't need the money." They'd saved for retirement already.

Give us this day our daily bread.

¹ <https://www.sfchronicle.com/food/wine/article/lagier-meredith-vineyard-new-owner-17312910.php>

Our Old Testament passage takes place in a famine. There is a new king in Israel, Ahab. And we're told in the previous chapter that "Ahab did more to provoke the anger of the Lord, the God of Israel, than had all the kings of Israel who were before him."

And that's saying something, because the kings of Israel were not a well-behaved bunch.

Ahab was bad news. And he married a woman who was even worse news. Jezebel, in addition to having the misfortune of being named Jezebel, was a foreigner, from Sidon, in what today would be Lebanon. And she worshipped a false god and convinced Ahab to join her in that idolatry.

Elijah announces a drought in response to this evil king. But a drought affects both the innocent and the evil. And droughts disproportionately affect the poor, who don't have the resources of the rich.

I'd like to suggest to Elijah he find a better way to prove his point about evil King Ahab. But I think even Elijah figured that out, because after the drought takes hold, he doesn't have anything to eat either. And then as our passage begins today, Elijah is sent to a widow who is from Sidon, the same place as Jezebel. God tells Elijah the widow has been commanded to feed and care for Elijah.

Our widow doesn't seem to have gotten this command. When Elijah finds her, gathering sticks, she says, "take care of you too? That's rich. If you were a better prophet, you'd know I don't even have enough to keep myself and my son alive. I'm about to make our final meal right now."

But Elijah tells her not to fear. And he tells her she can go ahead with her plan. But first he says... 'make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son. For thus says the Lord the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the Lord sends rain on the earth.'

The widow may not have heard God's command the first time, but she gets it now. And she obeys. And this is why I think it matters that God sent Elijah to a foreign widow who had nothing, who was down to her last ounce of oil and last crumbs of grain. Because it seems it is only when we are at the end that we see how to rely on God.

If God would have sent Elijah to a nice family in a Tel Aviv suburb, he could have lived in their guest room and waited out the drought in the comfort of their abundance.

But the widow had just barely enough. So, if Elijah, the widow, and her son were to make it through the drought, it wasn't going to be because of their own boot-strap-pulling, or savvy investing, or wise planning, or stockpiling of future daily breads.

They were only going to make it to tomorrow because of God's provision. Have you been in droughts like that?

I've not known physical hunger or scarcity as the Sidonian widow knew, but I've been in a place where I had just enough to get through that day.

My faith may have been nurtured during my life of comfort and abundance, but my faith was forged during those times of emptiness.

In a particularly difficult time in college, I remember going to bed at night, exhausted and thinking, "I don't have the strength to face people tomorrow. God, give me the strength." And I'd go to bed empty and wake up the next morning with just enough for that day. Just enough.

I had no reserves, but the well never ran dry. I was so thankful for that provision in my life. At each moment when I thought I wouldn't make it through, someone would offer me a daily bread of kindness and grace.

God's daily provision, however, doesn't mean prosperity or guarantee a life of ease. Daily provision is a gift of enough.

I wonder what the widow from Zarephath was thinking, as she took the last of her meal, scraping out the bottom of the jar with her spatula to get every last bit. Then she took the last of her oil, shaking the jug upside down over the pot until all of the oil has drip, drip dripped its way out of the jug, and she puts the loaf in the oven. She didn't have enough to sustain herself and her son, yet she trusts the word of Elijah's God and offers that small loaf to sustain her, her son, and Elijah. What did it feel like to bake that last loaf before God had refilled the jar with flour and the jug with oil?

To pray for daily bread is also a reminder to be present now, today, in this moment. Yes, on some level we are all here right now in this moment. But it often seems that many of our hopes, dreams, and energy are focused on a tomorrow that may not come.

Today is the gift we've been given.

As the Dave Mathews band sings, “the future is no place to place your better days.”

Planning for the future is not a bad exercise. We save for retirement and to pay for college. But if our future focus keeps us from spending time with the ones we love now, we’ve forgotten the gift of daily bread. When we catch ourselves thinking, “I don’t have time to go to my kids dance recital today but next year, I’ll make it” or, “we’re too busy now to go on a date, but when we retire, we’ll have time to travel” or, “we’ll schedule a family portrait after I lose some weight.”—when the things that matter to us consistently get put in tomorrow’s basket instead of today’s, we have forgotten the gift of daily bread.

Churches can do this too. I’ve known churches who closed their doors and quit ministry, but who had millions in their endowments when they closed. Spending your endowment down to zero is also not a recommended strategy, but think about how those churches could have turned things around if they saw their endowment as daily bread, enough to get them through a challenge and onto a new path.

When you give to the church to support our mission and ministry, it is our daily bread. And while we try to plan in responsible ways, we also have to trust that God’s provision, that the pledges will come in, that we will have what we need. For 168 years, Calvary has been at work in the city, trusting in God’s provision for us, and working to provide provision for others.

Give us this day our daily bread is a reminder to trust and a call to action.

In times of booming stock markets, maybe it is easier to not worry about tomorrow. But when markets are falling, as they have been recently, the call to pray for daily bread remains the same. In the good times, and in the lean, we pray for daily bread. When the future path seems clear, and when it is less than clear, we pray for daily bread.

There’s a quote from EL Doctorow that I like about writing. But it works for this part of the prayer too. “Writing is like driving at night in the fog. You can only see as far as your headlights, but you can make the whole trip that way.”

This week, as you pray, remember your daily bread. Be present in the moment you’ve been given. Be thankful for God’s provision for each day. Be aware of our connections to each other. Give us this day, our daily bread. Amen.