

## Our Daily Bread

a sermon given by the Rev. Rosemary Lloyd  
At The First Parish in Lincoln  
Sunday, March 24, 2019

In the course of his ministry of teaching and healing, Jesus was asked by his followers, “How should we pray? He said (more or less), “Pray like this:

*“Father, hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come.*

*<sup>3</sup> Give us each day our daily bread.*

*<sup>4</sup> Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.  
And lead us not into temptation.”<sup>1</sup>*

In just a few phrases, this widely-known Christian prayer establishes that the petitioner has a relationship to a benevolent God whom Jesus addresses as *Abba* (which is affectionately akin to *Daddy*). He models how our prayer should express a heartfelt desire to build beloved community on earth—*your kingdom come*, and to humbly ask for forgiveness and mercy.

When asked how we should pray, Jesus doesn’t offer a long litany. He doesn't ask for rituals involving burnt sacrifices or demand we walk across the desert on our knees. He does, however, remind us that we have hungers that need to be fed, to be nourished with daily bread.

Each line of The Lord’s Prayer merits its own sermon. Today I want to briefly reflect with you on the one that rises in the center of the prayer: the clear and direct petition, *Give us this day our daily bread*. We’ll take a little detour via the Torah and add in a little Buddhism and see where we end up...

With the leanness of a poet, Jesus acknowledges that we are spiritual beings in human form. We get hungry. We need food to care for these containers, these bodies.

Perhaps it’s because Jesus grew up with a Jewish mother and food and love were very connected...;

Or maybe his experience of fasting in the desert taught him that spiritual practice and development makes you really hungry...;

Whatever the impulse that inspired it, Jesus hit the mark by including this phrase, *Give us each day our daily bread*.

---

<sup>1</sup> Luke 11:1-4

It's quite possible that the formulation of this phrase harkens back to an extraordinary account found in the Jewish Torah. It is from the book of Exodus and the whole community Jesus was speaking to would have been very familiar with it.

The Exodus story recounts how, after years of working as slaves under Pharaoh, Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt. Unfortunately, the pursuit of their freedom was costly; they had to wander through the desert for forty years before finding the Promised Land.

They were always on the move. There were no houses with kitchens, no farms, no Donelan's or Whole Foods. And they were hungry. They complained daily to Moses about their hunger. Some argued that maybe they were better off being slaves because at least they were being fed. The colorful text tells us:

*"If only the Lord had killed us back in Egypt," they moaned. "There we sat around pots filled with meat and ate all the bread we wanted. But now you have brought us into this wilderness to starve us all to death."*<sup>2</sup>

Poor Moses reported their complaints in a meeting with God who came up with a surprising solution: He promised to rain down food from heaven. It would appear each morning on the desert floor he announced. This heavenly food is referred to as *manna*, which captures the astonishment of the people's discovery on the first day. *Manna* translates as "what's this?"

Each morning, the hungry congregation would leave their tents to collect the *manna* in baskets—enough for themselves and their families to eat their fill. But, they were instructed, collect enough for *just this* day. Do not to hoard leftovers overnight or the *manna* will "breed worms and turn foul" by morning.

Now, you know some people did that anyway, right? They kept some of what they collected overnight, you know, in case God didn't deliver on God's word the next day. And they were rewarded ...with slimy mold and worms in their tents.

There are very few messages in our contemporary culture that assure us that there will be enough for us tomorrow.

When I pray for daily bread, how much should I pray for? What would be sufficient? What would be enough to meet the hunger for security? For safety? For freedom? For the assurance that tomorrow will be ok, too?

It is said: we do not live by bread alone.<sup>3</sup>

Again, Jesus is the wise poet. There is more meaning embedded in the words of our prayer. When Jesus spoke to his friends and family, he likely used the local language which was

---

<sup>2</sup> Exodus 16: 3

<sup>3</sup> Deut 8:2-3; Matt 4:4; Luke 4:4

Aramaic. The Aramaic word for bread is *lachma*, which also means “understanding.”<sup>4</sup> So, he is also telling his followers to pray:

*Give us understanding.*

What kind of understanding would be useful and nourishing to meet your hunger?

Are you hungry to understand your purpose in life? Or to be more generous or loving. To be less judgmental—of yourself and others? To connect to something larger than yourself and feel less alone?

What, or who, can you imagine will feed your hunger?

Would it nourish you to understand that at your very core you already possess a divine spark of inherent worth and dignity? Could you receive *that* understanding and chew on it for a while? Could you digest it, metabolize it, turn it into strength enough to meet this day?

Teach us how to pray, said the disciples. Jesus replied: “Say, ‘Give us each day our daily bread.’”

Give us enough understanding to meet the next challenge, to take the next step in our lives. Enough to chip away the hardening around our heart that hides our essential self. Enough to free us from the fear of insufficiency. To reveal the spark of divinity already blazing in us. To embolden us to share our love and gifts with the world...

How then should we pray?

In Buddhism, there is a simple prayer practice called *Metta*: M-E-T-T-A. It means *loving kindness*. Thich Nhat Hanh teaches it in its most elemental form as a way to extend compassion.

He teaches his disciples to say:

*May I be happy.*

*May I be healthy.*

*May I dwell in peace.*

Like the seeming simplicity of the Lord’s prayer, each of these lines is packed with levels of meaning. What does it mean for me to be happy? What are the conditions and causes of peace? May I be healthy in mind? In body? In spiritual or financial well-being? Our spiritual work is to explore and understand just what these words mean to us as we go deeper.

And we can begin where we can begin. To enter this prayer sincerely wishing these things for ourselves at whatever level we understand them today.

The next step in the prayer practice is to call to mind someone you love. And send them *loving kindness*:

*May you be happy.*

---

<sup>4</sup> Neil Douglas Klotz, *Prayers of the Cosmos*, p 27

*May you be healthy.*

*May you dwell in peace.*

Thereafter, you can extend *metta* to all the people in your life, and to all the people you think about or hear about in the news and to all beings in the world:

May all beings be happy.

May all beings be healthy.

May all beings dwell in peace—free from danger and anxiety.

Friends, please do not construe beginning with yourself as selfish or self-absorbed. To love your neighbor *as yourself* is one of the great commandments handed down through the Abrahamic traditions. Yet too often we skip over the first step of cultivating love for ourselves.

Peace in the world begins with peace in my heart. In my home. In my town. My own peace is part of the whole world's peace. Without my being happy and peaceful and free from anxiety, it is difficult to understand what it is I am truly wishing for the rest of the world. It's like, "Put on your own oxygen mask first and then help others..."

Jesus taught his disciples through the ages to pray: Give US this day OUR daily bread. US includes YOU and your need for bread and understanding and freedom!

*And* it is a collective prayer for all beings.

We begin here, in this body, with this heart, to gain understanding.

Word by word, phrase by phrase, our poetic prayers rise like yeasted dough until they become bread for the soul, feeding us with enough for this day...enough to become nourishment for a hungry world.

Give us this day our daily bread.

May I be happy.

May you be happy.

May all beings be happy.

May it be so.            Amen.