

**First Presbyterian Church**  
**Matthew 6:11, “Give Us this Day”**  
**by Pastor Matt Johnson, 10/15/2017**

We’re looking at the Lord’s prayer  
over the course of a four-week series this month.

There are a couple reasons we’re doing this:

One is that this is a prayer we pray every single week,  
and at some point you have to kind of stop and wonder,  
“What is it we’re praying for every week, anyway?”  
If this prayer becomes simply a comfortable conclusion  
to the prayers of the people,  
if it is merely an opportunity to find solace in familiar phrases,  
if it’s just “what we’re supposed to do,”  
then I would argue we’d be better off without it.

However, another reason is that prayer can be hard.

It’s discouraging to feel like you’re “doing it right,”  
or that you understand how prayer is supposed to work.

Jesus was, in fact, a genius.

And this simple prayer that he’s given to the church  
has an internal flow and logic to it that is immensely valuable  
to us when we have a hard time praying.

This prayer, understood as Jesus intended it,  
is revolutionary, life changing, and even world changing.

It begins by naming God as “our Father in Heaven,” that is,  
our Best Possible Parent who is able to do whatever needs to be done.  
The “our” indicators that this is a relationship  
anyone is invited to share in. It’s not exclusive to Jesus  
or the super-spiritual.

Darrell Johnson has some great paraphrases for the petitions that follow:

- “Make yourself real,” (hallowed be your name)
- “Rule without rival,” (your kingdom come)
- “Fulfill all your good pleasures,” (your will be done)
- and “Bring heaven down,” (on earth as it is in heaven)

I think those are great. A very useful exercise  
for those of you who want to keep your experience  
of prayer fresh and alive  
is to do your own rephrasing work with each of the petitions.  
Re-write it according to what you have learned, or what you have experienced,  
recognizing that you aren't changing the Bible by doing so,  
but merely hacking away at some of the calcifications  
your brain has developed around these uber-familiar phrases.

God our Best Possible Parent: Make yourself real. Rule without rival.  
Fulfill all your good pleasures.  
And in all these things, Bring Heaven Down to earth.

These first three all focus on God and God's purposes first and foremost.

In the second half of the prayer, there is a shift of attention.  
For one thing, the pronouns are no-longer "you" and "your"  
but are now, "us" and "our."  
And so it is often emphasized that the topics move from heavenly realities  
(God's Name, God's Kingdom, and God's Will)  
to earthly needs (Daily Bread, Forgiveness, and Deliverance).

However, if you recall our examination of the first three lines of the prayer,  
you will remember we spent a lot of time talking about life  
here on earth. God's name is only hallowed when  
the divine character of God is displayed here on earth.  
And God's kingdom and will are asked to break into life here on earth.

In the same way, daily bread, forgiveness, and deliverance find their origin  
in God's eternal life as any of the others.

So, while we do find a shift of pronouns from focusing on God  
to focusing on humanity, we should not be tricked into thinking  
that this also means a shift from heaven to earth.

The whole prayer connects both heaven and earth at every moment.  
There is no sacred / secular divide between spiritual things  
that float around in another dimension and earthly things  
that can be measured, touched, replicated, and so on.

The Triune God *made* all this stuff, you know,  
including physics, biology, space, time, and all the rest.  
And it was called good.  
Not secular, not less-than. Good. Very good, actually,  
when it was all said and done.

Ridding ourselves of sacred / secular thinking  
will get us on track with Jesus just about every time.

Now, as we enter the second half of the prayer, Jesus has bread on his mind.  
The stuff of everyday survival, a core necessity of life.  
Now, the anti-carb people will say, “Oh, you can live without bread!”  
But that’s not really living, is it?

When I grew up, there was nothing that said “home” to me more  
than my mother’s homemade bread.

It was perfect. Tender, flavorful, crusty on the outside.  
Fresh from the oven with some butter on it –  
there was nothing more comforting to me in the world than that bread.

I learned later that this recipe began with a hot oatmeal mixture  
that later simply dissolved into the dough along with a little bit of molasses,  
leaving no trace of the rolled oats.

When I consider the most basic form of “bread,”  
these are the things that come to mind:  
The kneading, the flour all over our counters,  
the hot oven opening and closing,  
cooling racks filled with fresh loaves that were made with love.

What’s your bread? What is the staple of your daily living that reminds you  
who you are and where you come from?

**“Give us this day, our daily bread.”**

Praying this particular line raises some really good questions for us.

Here are some of the questions collected in the book,  
“Fifty-Seven Words that Change the World” (p. 68):

Some questions are ethical:

- Is it right for us who have more than “daily bread” to pray this prayer? Does such praying have integrity?

Others are practical:

- Do we really need to pray this prayer given God’s commitment to creation and humanity? Isn’t praying this prayer a lot like asking God to keep the earth turning and revolving around the sun?

Others are global:

- What about the millions of hungry, starving people in the world today – do not some of them pray this prayer? Then why do they go without bread? Is it that too many of us who prayed this prayer are hoarding the answer to the prayer?

Others are theological:

- How is praying for “daily bread” related to what Jesus teaches us in the section of his Sermon on the Mount which follows the Lord’s Prayer? How does praying the prayer relate to the exhortation, “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink ... So do not worry saying, ‘What shall we eat?’” (Matt. 6:25, 31)

Wow! Those should be enough to generate conversation at lunch today.

I’m not going to try to answer all of these questions,  
but I do hope you can find a pathway to responding  
to them through what follows.

The line has four components that I’m going to unpack one by one.

**First, “Give us.”**

Fundamentally, with these words we are asking  
to be granted something of God’s goodness, abundance, and providence.

Question for you: Are you one of those people  
who is hard to shop for at Christmas? I’m one of those.

If asked what I want, I usually say,  
“I don’t know ... I kind of don’t need anything.”

The sense is that all my basic needs are covered,  
and most of my “wants” are covered as well.  
For a person in my situation, what is happening  
when they turn to God and say, “Give us”?  
I would suggest that we’re opening our lives to God’s sovereignty,  
and saying, “I know I have more than I need.  
I know I’m hard to buy for at Christmas.  
So give me what *you* want for me.”

## **Second, “this day.”**

The nature of the request is the present day.  
Some translations prefer “this coming day.”  
Whichever we run with, this not “give us this month,”  
or “give us this year,” let alone “give us our retirement plan.”

It’s hard not to be reminded of the Israelites  
in the desert who were given manna to each.  
Each morning they were to collect enough for ... one day.  
And so they learned a daily dependence upon God.

The spirituality of Jesus at this point seems to resist  
seeking an abundance of comfort, or self-assurance  
about what the future holds.  
When people who have it all pray, “give us this day,” we are saying,  
“I know that even though it seems I have more than enough,  
I never know when a wildfire or earthquake may come,  
when my life may be asked of me,  
when the thin veneer of civility may come off,  
and I’m among the majority of humanity  
who look each day for  
merely one day’s bread.”

We are also inviting ourselves to be called to account  
for our wastefulness and extravagance.  
We are saying, “I only need and ask for daily bread,  
but I have so much more. What would you do with it, Lord?”

Give us this day...

### **Third, “our.”**

This is the flip side to the “our” in “our Father.” If, with “our Father,” Jesus invites *everyone* to share in this divine relationship, then “our” daily bread also includes everyone!

So when we pray for “our” daily bread, let us include in this pronoun citizens and non-citizens, the homeless and the homed, the standers and the kneelers, the LGBT and the straight, the light skinned and the dark skinned, and yes even non-Seahawk fans and Seahawk fans. For we are all the beloved of God.

Praying, “Give us this day *our*” is a chance to pray in solidarity with humanity all around the world.”

This reminds me of a prayer taught to me by my sister-in-law Carina Soderlund. She was living in Guatemala as part of a three year stint with the Mennonite Central Committee, and she learned to say this prayer before meals:

Gracias Senior, por el pan.  
Da pan a los que tienen hambre  
y hambre de justicia a los que tienen pan.  
Gracias Senior, por el pan.

Translated, “Thank you, Lord, for the bread.  
Give bread to those who have hunger,  
and a hunger for justice to those who have bread.  
Thank you, Lord, for the bread.

Praying like this, especially in another language,  
is a good way to put the “our” back into the Lord’s prayer.

### **Fourth, “daily bread.”**

Now we get to the heart of the request: Bread for each coming day.

Have you wondered what all can be  
legitimately included in this request for “bread”?

I suggest that we not overlook the literal meaning.  
This is, at the very least, a request for physical nourishment  
through bread or some similar basic sustenance.

Martin Luther wrote “This is not a prayer at the last minute  
to have a goose dropped in our mouth.”

In other words, there’s no magical thinking about God  
providing a high-level lifestyle.  
But historically the church has included  
other basic needs like shelter and clothes.

Beyond prayer for daily physical provision,  
I think we can include social provision as well.  
When we pray for daily bread, shelter, and clothing,  
we include all the mechanisms required  
to bring these things into our lives.  
At the least, that includes farms, mills, tradespeople and transportation.  
But it really also includes a stable and fair government,  
because without government access to necessities becomes difficult.

Dale Bruner suggests that “We live in ‘the Time of the Fourth Petition,’  
for there are so many hungry people in the world...  
Gospel preaching is unfaithful when it fails  
to include a lively concern that there be bread.  
The Fourth Petition, then, is the prayer for social justice.”

So there is a physical element to the bread we pray for,  
and a social / political element to the bread we pray for.  
There is also a spiritual element.

In Matthew 4:4, just before the Sermon on the Mount,  
Jesus declares that “the Son of Man does not live by bread alone,  
but by every word that comes from his Father in Heaven.”  
The daily bread we ask for, then,  
should include the bread of God’s living Word.  
It should include daily connection with Jesus, the Bread of Life.

God desires very much that basic human existence include a deep and growing awareness of God's active and empowering presence through the Holy Spirit.

This, too, is our daily bread.

[Pause]

To conclude our reflection on this short phrase,  
I want you to consider your own experience of bread.

Are you in need of daily bread – physically? socially? spiritually?

Do you have more bread  
than you can make use of – physically? socially? spiritually?

If you have places of abundance regarding your daily bread,  
how are you being led to use the extra you've been given?

How could you put others in connection with God's abundant provision?