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Lord, Teach Us to Pray: Our Daily Bread
Matthew 6:9-13

We are nearly two months into our Year of Prayer, and I will just say this: This experience is changing me... on the inside. I am thinking, behaving and responding differently, because of what God is doing to me through my prayer life. How about you? What one new step have you taken in your prayer life? Maybe it is a safe, baby step like what I call "Pillow Prayer"—praying every morning before you get out of bed or every night before you fall asleep. Or maybe it's signing up for the prayer retreat (It's already more than half full). Or maybe it's a gutsier step like that taken by some of our high school students.

This group call themselves "NOMADS" which stands for "No More Average Disciples." You might remember their student leader, Eric Anderson; he spoke in our services a few months back. Well, the NOMADS felt God was leading them to do something out of their comfort zone. So two weeks ago, they went to the Tacoma Mall and walked around, greeting people and asking if they could pray for them. Of course, some people said no, but many people said yes! And so, our students prayed with these complete strangers... right there in the Tacoma Mall.

I'll bet when you hear that you say, "Okay, taking a prayer walk with my wife doesn't sound quite so scary after all," right? Aren't you grateful for the courageous witness and example of our younger brothers and sisters in the Lord?

Today we continue our journey through the prayer-of-prayers, what we call the Lord's Prayer, taken from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Listen again to the Master:

⁹Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. ¹⁰Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹Give us this day our daily bread,
¹²and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

The Lord's Prayer is divided into seven petitions. Today we come to the fourth petition—smack dab in the middle. "Give us this day our daily bread..." Tim Keller calls this the "Gimme" petition... the one where we ask God for stuff. This is the form of prayer with which we are most familiar and most comfortable, isn't it? If we pray, the prayer is likely to be, "God, would you give me _____" and fill in the blank.

But Jesus doesn't start there. Up until now, the prayers have been focused on God, not us! Petition 1: Hallowed be Thy name. Petition 2: Thy kingdom come. Petition 3: Thy will be done. In other words, we start by praying that God's name—his holy character—be made central in our lives; that his kingdom be established in this world; that his perfect will be done. All these things—the hallowing of God's name, God's kingdom coming, God's will being done—are to happen on earth, just like in heaven, and they happen through us, his people.

So, the first half of the Lord's Prayer is focused on God. Only then does the prayer focus shift to us, in four ways: meet our needs, forgive our sins, lead us away from temptation and protect us from the Devil. In other words, the prayer now turns from a focus on God to a focus on what we require from our God: provision, forgiveness, guidance and protection.

And the starting point is here: "Give us this day our daily bread." But there's a problem with this prayer. We don't really mean it when we pray it. We mean it when we pray, "Forgive us our debts" because we know we need forgiving. We mean it when we pray, "Lead us not into temptation" because we know we need guidance. We mean it when we pray, "Deliver us from the evil one" because we know that the Devil prowls around like a lion, ready to devour us—we know we need protection.

But we don't really mean, "Give us our bread for today." We don't need God to give us bread or any other food. We've got Main and Vine. If we are really hungry, we've got Costco... bread two-packs! But if we look more closely at this petition, I think it will inspire and convict everyone one of us! So let's do that, one word at a time.

"Give." The first word of the petition is a word of dependence. When we pray to God, "Give," we are confessing something very important for us rich Christians to remember: everything I have comes from God's hands. Everything. Everything! I am completely dependent upon God's grace and kindness for everything in my life. We have a song we sing once in a while, and if you grew up in a Presbyterian church, you probably sang it every week. It's called the Doxology. The first line goes, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow." Let's sing that together.

Every blessing—every good thing we enjoy in life—flows from the gracious, generous heart of God. Including this loaf of bread. Really! The question is do you believe that? I remember one woman who didn't. I've told this before. One time, many years ago, a wealthy woman approached me and said, "Mark, you talk about how what we have is a gift from God, but I don't buy that. My husband and I worked hard for everything we have. God had nothing to do with it." We might be shocked when we hear those words spoken so blatantly, but many of us live as if we agree with her.

When we pray "Give" we are praying, "Please, loving, holy, father... please give to me what I need. I am completely dependent upon you. I acknowledge that, and I

am grateful for your kindness." This prayer-word is the antidote to self-sufficiency. When we humble ourselves and say, "Please, God will you give to me_____, we are admitting that we are utterly dependent upon God and that every good thing we enjoy is a gift from His hand. Do you believe that? "Give."

Second word: Us. "Give us." This is the prayer-word of Compassion. Notice, it is plural! Jesus doesn't teach us to pray, "Give me... gimme." It is "Give us..." When we pray "Give us this day our daily bread," it reminds us that it is not enough that I am well fed, or that my family is well fed. When others of God's children are hungry, cold, homeless... then this prayer is not yet answered and my responsibilities as God's ambassador are not yet finished.

Dale Bruner, my favorite Matthew commentator, says, "This petition should stick in the throat when prayed by full Christians; it reminds us of the wretched of the earth." (p. 250) I'll bet most of us here today are full. And if not, it's because we are dieting, because we ate too much and are fat. This prayer-word is an antidote to selfishness. It reminds me that even though my needs and my wants are being met, as long as there are hungry, cold, homeless and sick people in the world, I am not done praying and I am not done giving! Right?

Isn't this an invitation to generosity? If I pray for our daily bread, and have mine but am not willing to buy some from those who don't have theirs... isn't this an invitation to greater generosity on my part? And if you are not among those who give back to God, doesn't it challenge you to ask, "Why not? Do I really believe that my needs are more important than others? Do I really believe that God loves us rich American Christians more than he loves Haitian Christians or Syrian Christians or Cambodian Christians?"

Last week I invited you to join Cyndi and me in giving something to the Haitian hurricane relief work. That was a "Give us" moment. I'm pleased to say that many of you jumped at the opportunity. As of now, we will be sending an extra \$5,147 in aid. Thank you for your compassion! But if, when you heard of that need and read my request, the thought never crossed your mind to click that link and send even a dollar to help those wretched souls, could it be that you need to reflect more deeply on this word, "Us?"

Third word: Daily. Notice, this appears twice. Give us this day our daily bread. Jesus is highlighting this idea. I think this is a prayer-word of trust... trust in the predictable, repeatable faithfulness of God. Do I trust God enough to simply ask for what I need today, believing he will be trustworthy tomorrow, too?

When Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt and into the wilderness, they had lots of logistical challenges. One of them was this: how do you feed millions of mouths in a barren land? What was God's solution? Every morning when they came out of their tents, they found the ground covered with a thin, flakey substance that tasted like coriander seed wafers made with honey. The first time they saw it, they said,

"What's this?" Do you know how to say, "What's this?" in Hebrew? "Manna!" God provided bread from heaven every morning, and they were invited to scoop it up and feed their families. All they needed for that day, they were welcome to take.

But they were not to hoard any... no storing up! Of course, some disobeyed God. They socked away a little extra; just in case they ran out. Guess what happened? "Some left part of it till the morning, and it bred worms and stank." Exodus 16:20. God gave them enough bread for that day only; it was their "daily bread."

This prayer-word is an antidote to hoarding. It encourages us to trust that the God who met our needs yesterday, and is meeting our needs today, will meet our needs tomorrow, too. This is the prayer-word that convicts me most. As you know, Cyndi and I sold our home in May and moved into a one-bedroom flat, and I like it. It is lovely and simple and easy to care for. I am realizing; I don't need another thing. I am at peace about what I have right now. But I am also realizing that I am not at peace about what I will have in the future. For some reason, I have trouble trusting that God who has been faithful to me so far will continue to be! I wonder and worry, "Have I saved enough? Have I invested wisely? Do I need to do more?" I find my heart becoming like those Israelites who wanted to hoard extra manna just in case God didn't come through!

Daily... daily bread. I wonder what would happen if every day, everything we set aside for a rainy day just rotted and bred worms? What if, every day, our bank accounts went to zero and we had to start over... had to depend on the God of our daily bread to take care of us that day, too. There is nothing wrong with saving for the future. In fact, Proverbs has a name for someone who doesn't work and doesn't save: "Fool!" But there is a difference between saving your wealth as a good steward and hoarding your wealth as a stingy, fearful Scrooge. Anyone here need to join me in learning how to really pray, "Give us this day our daily bread?"

The last word is "Bread." I think this is a prayer for Simplicity. Jesus didn't teach us to pray, "Give us this day our daily cake or our daily lobster or our daily rib eye." The prayer was for our simple needs to be met. This doesn't mean we shouldn't enjoy cake or lobster or rib eye when we are blessed with it. But it does mean, I think, that we should learn to be content with less and simpler things.

One of the great things about downsizing is that we've been forced to live more simply. Even now, when I look at my drawer bulging with clothes, I think, "I need to get rid of more. I don't need this much." How can that possibly be anything but a good thing? For us western, rich Christians to ask ourselves this question, "What would it mean for me to live more simply? To do with a little less than I have, so I might share a little more with others?" Would that hurt us? Would it do anything but help us?

This prayer-word is an antidote to greed. And let's face it, we are a greedy culture. We gobble up a huge share of the world's resources vastly disproportionate to our

population. Frankly, both of the presidential candidates are a reflection of this culture; they are both greedy people. But before we wag our fingers too wildly, think about this: When was the last time you said, "I have enough! In fact, I have more than I need. I need to get rid of stuff and give more away!"? Surely when we pray, "God give us our daily bread"—surely such prayer is a way for us as Christ-followers to push back against the greed-tide... to live more simply, more generously, more contentedly?

Here's an idea: John the Baptist once told his listeners, "If you have two cloaks, give one away." What if everyone here went home, looked around the house for duplicates, and gave one to the Food Bank? Two rain coats—give one away? Two red shirts—give one away? Two coffee makers—give one away. A little silly, perhaps, but the only way to fight greed is to live more generously... more simply. What would that look like for you?

Give us, this, day our daily bread. Dependent, compassionate, trusting, simple... this is truly counter-cultural living for us. But you know how it is possible for us to consider living this way? By returning to the first two words of the prayer: Our Father. When we remember that we have a good, loving father who wants to give us good gifts—wants to give us the Holy Spirit, wants to use us to bring his kingdom on earth—it frees us up to live like this, to pray this prayer and really mean it.

We are walking through a political season of unrest. Everyone is anxious; many are despairing. I get it; I feel some of those things, too. So I have two compassionate words for all of us. Stop it! Stop worrying! Our loving, giving, trustworthy, compassionate Father is on the throne. In the end really, it doesn't matter who is in the Oval Office. Our Father's Kingdom will come; our Father's will, will be done. And Our Father will give us this day, and every day, all that we need. If you believe that, say "Amen!"