

Jesus' Prayer: Our Daily Bread

Exodus 16:2-21 (Common English Bible)

Narrator: The whole Israelite community complained against Moses and Aaron in the desert.

Israelites: "Oh, how we wish that the Lord had just put us to death while we were still in the land of Egypt. There we could sit by the pots cooking meat and eat our fill of bread. Instead, you've brought us out into this desert to starve this whole assembly to death."

The Lord: "I'm going to make bread rain down from the sky for you. The people will go out each day and gather just enough for that day. In this way, I'll test them to see whether or not they follow my Instruction. On the sixth day, when they measure out what they have collected, it will be twice as much as they collected on other days."

Moses: "This evening you will know that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt. And in the morning you will see the Lord's glorious presence, because your complaints against the Lord have been heard. Who are we? Why blame us?"

Moses: "The Lord will give you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning because the Lord heard the complaints you made against him. Who are we? Your complaints aren't against us but against the Lord."

The Lord: "I've heard the complaints of the Israelites. Tell them, 'At twilight you will eat meat. And in the morning you will have your fill of bread. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God.'"

Narrator: In the evening a flock of quail flew down and covered the camp. And in the morning there was a layer of dew all around the camp. When the layer of dew lifted, there on the desert surface were thin flakes, as thin as frost on the ground. When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, "What is it?" They didn't know what it was.

Moses: "This is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat. This is what the Lord has commanded: 'Collect as much of it as each of you can eat, one omer per person. You may collect for the number of people in your household.'"

Narrator: The Israelites did as Moses said, some collecting more, some less. But when they measured it out by the omer, the ones who had collected more had nothing left over, and the ones who had collected less had no shortage. Everyone collected just as much as they could eat.

Moses: "Don't keep any of it until morning."

Narrator: But they didn't listen to Moses. Some kept part of it until morning, but it became infested with worms and stank. Moses got angry with them. Every morning they gathered it, as much as each person could eat. But when the sun grew hot, it melted away.

Mark 6:30-44 (Common English Bible)

Narrator: The apostles returned to Jesus and told him everything they had done and taught. Many people were coming and going, so there was no time to eat. Jesus said to the apostles:

Jesus: "Come by yourselves to a secluded place and rest for a while."

Narrator: They departed in a boat by themselves for a deserted place. Many people saw them leaving and recognized them, so they ran ahead from all the cities and arrived before them. When Jesus arrived and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Then he began to teach them many things. Late in the day, his disciples came to him and said:

Disciples: "This is an isolated place, and it's already late in the day. Send them away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy something to eat for themselves."

Jesus: "You give them something to eat."

Disciples: "Should we go off and buy bread worth almost eight months' pay and give it to them to eat?"

Jesus: "How much bread do you have? Take a look."

Disciples: "Five loaves of bread and two fish."

Narrator: Jesus directed the disciples to seat all the people in groups as though they were having a banquet on the green grass. They sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. He took the five loaves and the two fish, looked up to heaven, blessed them, broke the loaves into pieces, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. Everyone ate until they were full. They filled twelve baskets with the leftover pieces of bread and fish. About five thousand had eaten.

Today we reach a turning point in the Lord's Prayer. We've spent the past four weeks aligning out hearts, minds and wills with God's. Now we turn from our concern about God's affairs – God's name, God's kingdom, God's will – to God's concerns about our affairs – our bread, our sins, our temptations. When we ask God to be concerned with our affairs, the first thing we ask is "Give us this day our daily bread."

Jesus is talking both literally and spiritually. Nearly everybody in Jesus' life would have been classified as "food insecure" by today's standards. They did not know where the next meal was coming from or how they would acquire it. Jesus is serious about praying for food: real food – apples, peaches, cheese, bread, milk, meat, fish, cereal, broccoli, carrots, squash. "It's never just about food," New Testament scholar John Dominic Crossan says; "it's also about just food."

Jesus' ministry revolves around food and eating. He and the disciples eat when the Pharisees say they should be fasting. He shares table fellowship with the socially excluded - tax collectors, outcasts and sinners.

Jesus tells stories comparing the kingdom of God to a wedding banquet – a community feast where there's always enough. Whenever the crowd is hungry for bread as well as hope, Jesus makes sure there's more than enough to go around.

Before he is put to death, Jesus takes bread, give thanks, breaks it and gives it to his friends, saying, "This is my body, my life, given for you." And after the resurrection, grieving disciples recognize him in the breaking of the bread. Jesus is focused on food and feeding.

Our readings from God's Word are familiar stories about bread. Mark assumes that we know the one in Exodus because it shapes his story. In both tales, there's a problem with food. People are in isolated, dangerous places, and they're hungry.

Israel is out in the desert wilderness, having just been liberated by God from slavery in Egypt. They are free, but they are starving. A crowd of people gather to hear Jesus preach in what Mark calls a deserted place – that's a biblical cue for somewhere between Vaughn and Roswell... a long way from a Blake's Lotaburger. They are hungry to hear him speak, but eventually physical hunger sets in.

In the first story, the people complain to Moses, Moses complains to God, and God solves the problem. Mysterious stuff appears on the ground every morning. "Man-hu" in Hebrew which means "what is it?" The stuff becomes bread after baking or boiling it. Is this the beginning of bagels?

In the gospel story, the disciples bring the hunger problem to Jesus. It's late in the day. They're far from any town. The disciples have a solution: send the people away. Jesus has a different idea: you give them something to eat!

Crossan calls this a "parable that emphasizes (the disciples') responsibility for the distribution of God's food to God's people." Unlike the Exodus story where God makes food come down from heaven, Jesus makes the actual food people have into enough for everyone.

Both stories have two powerful similarities: equity and abundance. It's free food, and everyone eats. There are no distinctions; no exceptions; no qualifications. All are hungry and all are fed. In Exodus, there is always enough for each day and a double portion for the Sabbath. And that pattern repeats for years.

In Mark, there's more than enough when the food passes through what Crossan describes as "the hands of divine justice". When it is taken, blessed, broken and given out - when it is seen as God's consecrated gift - there are leftovers!

In these and virtually every other story about food in the Bible, eating is a communal activity. Eating is something we do together either in person or virtually. It's something that creates community. If you feed them, they will come. From potlucks to wedding banquets to funeral receptions, if you feed people, they will hang out and talk to one another. Information is shared. Bonds are formed. Community and common life is forged.

As with eating, so with this prayer. It is not my prayer; it is ours. Even if I am praying by myself, it's still "Our Father who art in heaven." The same is true of food. I am not asking for me, but for we.

"Give us this day our daily bread." I'm praying for sustenance for you. I'm praying you will receive adequate nourishment today. I'm praying today you will get what you need to live. I'm praying you won't starve and your spirit won't wither away.

And just how big is our understanding of we? Who's included? Who's excluded and why? How long will it take for us to see that Jesus means the whole human family? Give us all bread.

We live in a nation where 140 million people are poor. They are one fire, health crisis, job loss, or severe storm away from deep poverty. During the pandemic, 11% of adults report household members

do not have enough to eat. Hunger isn't a problem limited to certain populations or regions. 1 in 5 Black and Latinx families and individuals do not have enough to eat, as do 1 in 4 white and Asian.

Most folk were pushed into hunger by job loss. Many others are still employed, but were pushed them into hunger because they lost hours or earnings and other supports. Across the board, families with children are going hungry on a daily basis. 26-29 million people do not have their daily bread right now.

Our church does what it can to feed hungry individuals and families in this valley. But it's not enough. Food pantries are important, but government programs like SNAP or food stamps feed 20 times more people. We need to raise our voices with our representatives at the local, state and national level to make ending hunger a national priority.

If we're honest with ourselves, we don't think about daily bread because our pantries, refrigerators and freezers are full. At my house, we have English muffins, blueberry bagels, flour and corn tortillas, Dave's 21 Grain & Seed slices, pita bread, and hamburger buns to pick from. You and I are more concerned about the kind of bread we're eating rather than having any to eat. And that makes it difficult to remember that we're dependent on God and our siblings are hungry on a daily basis.

Sixteen hundred years ago, a church leader named Basil the Great said this: "The bread that is spoiling in your house belongs to the hungry. The shoes mildewing under your bed belong to those who have none. The clothes stored away in your trunk belong to those who are naked. The money that depreciates in your treasury belongs to the poor." (Willimon & Hauerwas)

Beloved, our bread, our food, is not ours to hoard. It belongs to our hungry sisters and brothers. Bread is God's gift to be shared and used to build community. To pray, "Give us today our daily bread" means radically reexamining ourselves. It means acknowledging the claim God places on us with the gift of bread. It means taking responsibility for our neighbors' needs. It means ask what will I do to feed God's hungry people?

In his book, "The Greatest Prayer: Rediscovering the Revolutionary Message of the Lord's Prayer", John Dominic Crossan writes about the two sides of Jesus' prayer. First, we speak to God about God: your name be hallowed; your kingdom come; your will be done. Second, we speak to God about ourselves: give us bread; forgive our debts; do not bring us to the test but save us from evil.

Crossan sees this as a pattern of reciprocity. What does it look like when God's name is hallowed, when God's reign is realized, when God's will is done? It looks like this: all of us have bread enough to eat. Our debts to one another and to God are forgiven. We are not brought to the ultimate test, but are protected from evil.

Later during Prayers of the God's People, we're going to use a paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer taken from the New Zealand Prayer Book. It draws on images of God and creation from native Maori traditions. The prayer is both bold and humble: "With the bread we need for today, feed us." Feed us all, dear God, and empower us to share our daily bread.

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