

THE LORD'S PRAYER: A PATTERN FOR LIFE

III. "THE NECESSITY OF DAILY BREAD"

MARCH 22, 2020

This sermon would have been preached on March 22, 2020

The Sermon:

I've been thinking a lot about the Lord's Prayer – both reading and wondering about it. When I see it in the bulletin, I find myself reflecting on phrase after phrase.

You may have heard: what we think about during the day works away in our minds while sleeping at night. The body may be in repose, but our minds are churning, reviewing the day, sorting out things, testing, deciding "Is this worth saving for the future?"

It turns out this is the "stuff" of dreams, what dreams are made of. They are the labors of the mind.

I may have had a dream the other night; I'm not sure... dreams do have a wispy quality so that I can hardly remember when I wake.

You all were included in my dream. We were in this sanctuary, together saying the Lord's Prayer. Suddenly, after "Thy Kingdom come," someone stands in the congregation and says: "Stop! You don't really mean it!"

That would be shocking enough to make us think:

- Really, do we mean it?
- And what does it mean if we did?

If we truly prayed for God's kingdom and will to be done on earth, could there, would there be radical changes in the way we act, a different influence on the way we live?

For example, some of us might go to the bank tomorrow, draw out a significant sum, and give it to fight hunger and poverty in the world.

Some would spend this very afternoon going to see enemies, asking their forgiveness, and they of us.

Others would be thinking about how to reform their businesses to give customers more value and provide more care for employees and their families; to engage ethical business standards.

Would we restructure our schedule for others instead filling days for ourselves; more time for communicating and loving, more for being with each other?

Certainly we would plan more time for God.

Gracious! Are we now we are talking about a genuine revolution if this prayer was an authentic pattern for life?

I remember a comment made by Mark Twain. He had heard people complaining how hard the Bible was to understand. Twain's classic comment? He said he was more bothered by the parts of the Bible he *could understand* than by the parts he could not. The Lord's Prayer might be just like that.

II.

We cover the waterfront in this prayer. We move from the bigness of God to our most basic needs, from God's Kingdom to the table and a loaf, from a view of God's majesty that sweeps across the sky, to the crumbs of our most immediate requirements for life.

That's why I am calling this prayer "A Pattern for Life" ... it is precisely about life. Jesus tells us that God deals not only in ways high and mighty, in acts with high brow terms, in huge words with hidden meanings.

God deals also with the world ... and with persons like you and me, in such ordinary things as bread, water, and in meeting our daily needs. God is intimate as well.

III.

Now, I suspect this sounds dandy in a sermon, but I submit to you it is a lot harder to work through in life.

It's harder as we discover how tough it is to find room for God in our daily life. Perhaps it is because we believe so deeply in our own sufficiency: "I can take care of my own bread, my own needs. Mind you, I am able to provide for my family. I certainly don't need charity. Thanks, but no thanks!"

Dependency is hard for us to acknowledge. Perhaps this will become for us a major lesson from this virus pandemic, that we do not live by ourselves, but in community. And it is the community that we need.

In the Lord's Prayer, when I pray for something so simple as bread, it reminds me that I stand in need. I need somebody. I need something. I do not stand alone. I need! I am not the master of my fate I like to think I am.

I must depend on other people. Living in interdependence with others around me becomes a blessing. And I deeply need God in my life at the most basic level, at the foundation of it all.

In the final analysis, this pray says that all of us are like children in need of bread; "Daddy, I'm hungry," When we pray for bread, we come with our hands empty. We come aware that we can not store up life for tomorrow. Coming in a daily fashion, we are reminded that we belong to each other and to God.

When I pray about bread, I am addressing the One who is able to provide it.

And of course, if Jesus is pointing us to so basic an item as bread, he is also pointing us to the other basics in life: our relationships, our dreams and visions; even those small worries that left to themselves grow to mountainous barriers between ourselves and God.

And when I pray, "give us this day our daily bread," I am also pointing right back to our sisters and brothers in the whole human family. It is "our" bread, our common needs, our life together, and not only "mine," not just me. The web is forever in a tangled state: me, my neighbors, and my God.

IV.

It was some years ago that 1,400 persons met in the grand ballroom of a large Chicago hotel to honor that city's mother of the year.

She turned out to be a women no one had heard of. She was Mrs. Dominic Salvino, an Italian immigrant, a housewife and extremely poor.

Mrs. Salvino lived on Erie Street. She had many neighbors who were poorer than she. They had eight children to her four. They were old, she was only 49. They were sick, she was healthy. They were tired, she was full of energy. They had drunken husbands, she had a good steady man.

Mrs. Salvino appointed herself the unofficial, untrained, neighborhood social worker, and assigned herself to Erie Street. She visited the sick. She collected money from the comparatively poor and gave it to the disparately poor. She did the housework of the bedridden, cooked for the motherless - and spread smiles the length and breadth of Erie Street.

Altogether, she put in about 1,600 hours a year at her avocation. This was more than any other mother in Chicago had done, the Committee said. Her ministry was to the most basic of needs. She brought the daily bread; that's what Mrs. Salvino did.

V.

My points have been straight-forward this morning. They are simply this:

1. The Biblical message is that God meets us where we are, in the world of our ordinary, the world of bread and life.
2. But sometimes we do not find God - not because God is absent, but because we block the way. It is so hard to relax our pride to the point where we say: "I need. I cannot be everything to myself and end up being anything at all."
3. Why? (and this is the third point) because we only live well when we live in communion with others. When, instead of praying for my daily bread, I am able to pray for daily bread for us all.

Bread is a symbol for it all. It is the gift of God, meant to be broken and shared with the world. Our prayer points us to the hungers of body and soul experienced by the human family.

When you and I as Christians, and this church as a Christian Community, live only for the bread on our table, then when it has been consumed, strangely our hunger has not been satisfied.

But to move out, to reach out, to multiply the gift, that is to cause Jesus' words to come true: And the world will be fed by the true and rich bread that we bring.

