

# **Our Daily Bread (& Butter)**

Luke 11:5-13

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Today, in our series based upon The Lord's Prayer, we reach the petition, "Give us this day, our daily bread." In the Gospel of the Luke, Jesus teaches his disciples the prayer and then tells a parable. That is our lesson for today. Hear, now, these teachings of Jesus from the Gospel of Luke.

Luke 11:5-13

And Jesus said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.' And he answers from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

"So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Parent give the Holy Spirit to those who ask!"

For the Word of God in scripture,  
For the Word of God among us,  
For the Word of God within us,  
**Thanks be to God.**

In April of 2018, Katie Miller and I attended a denominational meeting in Cleveland focused on the current problems of theological formation in the life of the UCC. While there, discussing these issues with various denominational leaders, a wonderful story of theological formation emerged back home.

The first night I was gone, Michael was carrying out the bedtime routine with Sebastian. After reading a couple of books and beginning to rock, Sebastian said they needed to pray. Now, this is usually something I do with Sebastian, so Michael was a little surprised, but went ahead. They prayed for family and friends by name and then Michael, knowing my routine, ended with the Lord's Prayer.

Just as Michael was about to say "Amen," Sebastian (who was only two at the time) grabbed Michael's face and said, "You forgot the bread."

Michael then realized that he had, in fact, forgotten to say, "Give us this day our daily bread." So, he went back and added it.

Colleagues in Cleveland were thrilled with this story of theological formation that's working.

Then I returned to Omaha.

My first night back I was doing the bedtime routine. As I was about to finish the Lord's Prayer, Sebastian grabbed my face and said, "You forgot the butter."

"The butter?" I asked. Then I remembered that in the blessing his daycare uses before meals they mention bread and butter. I told him, "The butter's in the prayer you use at school."

He said, "I want to use it at home."

I then asked, "You think we should add butter with our bread in the Lord's Prayer?"

"Yes," he answered.

Then I ventured, "You think that would be an improvement?"

"Yes," he answered again.

Sebastian wasn't wrong. The bread would be better with butter. When I've told that story I've had other people laugh and say we should add jam or honey as well.

Nineteen months later, Sebastian is still praying the Lord's Prayer asking for daily bread and butter.

This is, I believe, more than a humorous story. Pastor's do like telling cute stories about their kids and grandkids because they provide such good material. But I also think Sebastian was onto something about the theology of the prayer. According to the Polish scholar Anna Wierzbicka, "Bread is a metaphor that stands not only for food but also for all the other good and necessary things in life."

Sebastian, on some level, grasped this and wanted to add butter because butter is another good thing that blesses our lives. When we ask, in the Lord's Prayer, for our daily bread, we are praying for all the good things of God that sustain our lives. We are asking those blessings for ourselves and everyone else as well.

Bread is, of course, a potent symbol in the biblical story. This fact is explained well in Walter Brueggemann's little book *The Bible Makes Sense*, which I recommend for anyone wanting a handy introduction to how to read and interpret the Bible.

Brueggemann writes that when we read the Bible we enter into what he calls a "life-world," which he describes as a "network of symbols, words, gestures, and images that give meaning and coherence to our experience." The biblical life-world nurtures our imagination and invites us to play with images from the biblical history. Imagination is key here, as he

explains that imagination is “the gift of vitality that enables the believing community to discern possibility and promise, to receive newness and healing where others only measure and count and analyze.”

For Brueggemann the paradigm example of how the biblical life-world invites our imaginations to play with a symbol is the image of bread, particularly the idea of bread in the wilderness.

During the exodus from Egypt, the children of Israel were wandering in the wilderness of the Sinai peninsula and were running out of provisions for feeding themselves. They prayed to God for deliverance, and God provided manna—this mysterious substance that appeared in the morning and could be baked into bread to feed the people.

Key to this story is the setting—the wilderness. That too became a central biblical image. Brueggemann describes it as “a place of precariousness without food, without defense or resource.” He continues, “The center of this memory is in the wonder that in this place where death seemed certain, God is present, having also submitted to the conditions of the desert.”

Out of that amazement of God’s presence and deliverance in such a setting, the biblical tradition has developed a rich use of these images. The Isaiah passage read earlier is one example. That is a poem for despairing exiles to remind them that God is present with them in their distress and it draws upon the exodus memory for its images. In the Gospels we have the stories of Jesus feeding the multitudes. Of those Brueggemann writes that Jesus transformed wilderness into a place of nourishment—“a place of abandonment into one of caring power, a place of death into a time of life.”

And the image of bread continues to spread through the tradition. In the Gospel of John Jesus describes himself as the bread of life. Bread becomes a central image of the Eucharist. The Book of Revelation imagines a wedding feast that will be celebrated at the end of time, when food represents the abundance of God’s salvation and setting everything right.

So it is no stretch for us to use the Exodus memory of bread in the wilderness and apply it to our lives. Most of us are never going to be lost wandering in a wasteland looking for food. But we do experience metaphorical wildernesses as we grieve, as we are anxious and afraid and depressed, when we are seriously ill, when our jobs and relationships suddenly end.

“Give us this day, our daily bread” is our appeal for God to be present with us in these times, to provide for us, to bless us, to deliver us. So, yes, it is more than just bread.

But bread is also important not just because of the rich imagery of the biblical tradition. Bread in the prayer is also literally bread. The staple food that sustains us. The common, ordinary aspect of our daily life. You wouldn’t be surprised to learn that in other cultures where another food is the staple, such as rice in East Asia, they adapt the language and metaphor.

An essential aspect of the prayer is that we are praying for something very basic, very ordinary. We are praying for God to give us what we need every day of our lives if we are to live and flourish. The prayer expresses a shared human condition—that we need help. We cannot do this on our own. We rely on help from a higher power. We rely upon each other.

“Do not worry,” is one implication of the prayer. And especially of the parable that Jesus teaches right afterwards in the Gospel of Luke. Do not be consumed by worry, anxiety,

and fear, because God is going to provide for you. God is a loving parent and will not turn away from God's beloved children. What you need will be there.

I know even in my own life there are times when it seems that what I need isn't there. And, yet, usually if I take the time to quiet my anxiety and pay attention, it is in fact there. The thought that will turn a situation around. The friend who can provide the support, care, or advice that I need. The simple beauty in nature that lifts me momentarily out of myself. The hilarious incident that makes me laugh when I didn't think laughter was possible.

We pray with the confidence that every day God is providing for us what we need. And sometimes that is literally bread.

Which teaches us something about prayer. Prayer is not some extra activity that we must make time for in our lives. Oh, sure, there are types of prayer that might require some set aside quiet time, but not prayer at its most basic and ordinary, for we can pray in the midst of our work and play and commutes in traffic.

My favorite writer on prayer is the Quaker Richard Foster who has a great book simply entitled *Prayer*. In a chapter on "Praying the Ordinary" he writes, "Prayer is not another duty to add onto an already overcommitted schedule . . . our work becomes prayer. It is prayer in action." Everything we do can be a form of prayer. Our ordinary lives can be lived attuned to and in gratitude for God's presence and blessing.

Our daily bread, then, is a rich image that connects us to the biblical life-world. It is a reminder that God provides every day our most basic needs. It teaches us that we can pray every moment of our ordinary lives. And there is still more we can say about this image.

It is a reaction to consumerism, by reminding us that what we need will be provided for us and comes to us from God, not the almighty dollar. It teaches us to live more simply with what we truly need and not get lost in consuming all the luxuries that surround us.

The petition also teaches us, as theologian Timothy Bradshaw writes, that time has meaning. We should not overlook that we are praying for something "this day" and that thing is our "daily bread." Bradshaw points out that these words imply that God is present in time, working in time, giving meaning to our human time. I can imagine a whole sermon developing just this idea.

And, of course, there is the connection to communion. When Jesus taught the prayer, he had not yet instituted the Lord's Supper, but it is impossible for us Christians to pray these words and not be connected to the celebration of communion and all that this meal means to us as a matter of worship, fellowship, and spirituality.

Timothy Bradshaw writes, "Prayer for our daily bread is prayer to the one who desires communion with us." God wants to be in a daily, personal, ecstatic, loving relationship with us. And God wants us to have that sort of meaningful relationship with one another, with all people, with all creation. To comprehend the deep and intimate ways we are all connected to one another.

On this Sunday we commemorate All Saints Day, when the Christian church remembers and celebrates its saints—all of those people who have preceded us in this life of faith. In our

congregation we name those who have died in the last year, a long list this year as you can see in your insert.

Our Christian faith teaches us that life is greater than death, hope is more powerful than despair, love and joy and beauty and adventure and peace—these are the things that ultimately matter.

And so the lives of these saints continue on in the presence of God and in the memories of those they loved and taught and cared for. They remain a part of our communion, now and for all time.

Even that is a part of this prayer.

So, aware of all the rich meanings connected to these simple words, let us pray as Jesus taught us to pray. And maybe, like Sebastian, add what will remind you of God's presence and blessing every day of your life.

Give us this day, our daily bread (& butter).