

## ***Why Do We Need Help From God?***

*Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us*

What Am I Doing When I Pray?

Part 3, series on The Lord's Prayer

Matthew 6 & Luke 11

**Matthew 6:4-14** <sup>4</sup> so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. <sup>5</sup> "And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. <sup>6</sup> But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. <sup>7</sup> "When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. <sup>8</sup> Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. <sup>9</sup> "Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. <sup>10</sup> Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. <sup>11</sup> Give us this day our daily bread. <sup>12</sup> And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. <sup>13</sup> And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one. <sup>14</sup> For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you;

**Luke 11:1-4** **1** He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." **2** He said to them, "When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. **3** Give us each day our daily bread. **4** And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial."

## **I**

There are **two aspects** of this great prayer today. **One** is the **request and recognition of a need and provision for sustenance** – "our daily bread" – to survive. The **other** part of this prayer points to the **nature and nurture of our sustaining relationship with God and each other.** **How** can we be **fully at peace and be reconciled to God**, when we **remain** and choose to remain in **broken relationship** with another? This is the dilemma of

**"forgiveness."** This is the human struggle with pride and humility -- choosing to worship God or self.

The Lord's Prayer is the most frequently used prayer in the Christian church. It is also central in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. With this prayer we focus on God, when we say "Our Father." We acknowledge the Kingdom of God and God's will that Jesus wants us to seek first. This is our relationship to God, placing our lives squarely before God as the supreme being in life. Then we place ourselves in a loving relationship with others and our self, as we continue offering our petitions – "give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." The Lord's Prayer says in this way what the Hebrew people and Jesus said, "***Love God with all your being and others as yourself.***" That is what we say repeatedly not to do it habitually or glibly; but to **remember** who we are and whose we are. We should fear more that we **forget** this divine human relationship in life and in prayer. When we worship, it is an always an act of **REMEMBERING**.

## II

***Why do we need to pray this prayer of our Lord?*** There are two reasons that are most apparent. **First**, we need the daily sustaining love of God to live alive in faith. **Second**, we need the power of God to cross the great divide that separates us from each other, which is as wide and deep as the Grand Canyon. This divide is **as terrible as the thirty foot wall and electrified fence** which separates Jerusalem from Bethlehem. This is the horrible **reality of dividing walls of hostility** that make us fearful and vengeful against those whom we perceive as our enemies. I stood on one side of that imposing wall, seeing soldiers guarding in the fields, troops at check points with their fingers on their triggers of their rifles. I saw evidence of suicide bombs and rockets that shelled a land without any accuracy. I have seen divisions in families that drain energy and life in their conflict and unresolved hurts of each other. I have seen the political arena look like a bloody ground of mud slinging and insult hurling that leaves little room for real human issues and debate and drains hope from its citizenry. I have seen church members resentful – old of the young, new impatient with the elderly long time members, frustration of the established culture against the rising new cultures, fearful of being taken over. I have felt the deep fear and resentment of Christians against Muslims, Muslims against Jews, and Jews against Christians and Muslims against Christians. It is a triangle of fear, hurt and resentment that never seems to end, unless God is able to work with and through us.

This is why we need the Lord's Prayer to keep us focused in humility before a God who can work miracles. Do you believe that?

### III

The second part of the Lord's Prayer **begins** a series of human **petitions** set before an almighty and loving God, whom we have addressed as "Our Father." This **first petition** is linked to the **second petition**. "*Give us our daily bread and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us...*"

When we say *Give us our daily bread*, does that seem selfish and self serving? It might if it were to mean to give only to **ME** this bread. It might be self focused if were to say *Give me MY bread*. Just as we say **OUR FATHER, NOT MY FATHER IN HEAVE, WE SAY OUR BREAD NOT MY BREAD.** What a difference it is to say **our and not me or my bread.**

I have been taking conversational Hebrew online with a little old Jewish lady in Jerusalem and with new friends in Canada, Texas and California. Early in our lessons we learned that there were two different words for bread. One that is more commonly used is *lechem*. This is the bread you serve on your table to eat. The other bread is the holy bread used in worship. It is called *challa*. Bread is blessed at each meal. This is the sacred moment in the holy seder that is done each year.

We pray for the bread we need to survive each day. Where does it come from. Who provides it? This bread is what Jesus spoke about when he said, "I am the bread of life." This is the bread we offer in Holy Communion, when we say, "Take this bread and eat." We know that God is working to nurture us in love and grace as we receive this holy bread.

The Hebrew people remembered that God alone provides bread to survive. The old Testament story about this is set in the wilderness, when the people cried out for food. God gave them bread each morning that appeared on the grass. They were to take only as much as they needed for that day. If they took too much bread, it would spoil and would be no good.

Bread reminds us that we are people who are anxious for our life. Because of this anxiety and fear that the world breeds in us, we panic when the Dow goes down or the gas price goes up. We hoard food rather than share it. We neglect helping others who are sick or out of a job or on the streets, because we don't want to give up any of our bread that sustains our life for fear of losing it.

The literal translation of "daily bread" means the "bread for tomorrow." Jesus responds to our worries, anxieties and fears of surviving or dying. He knows what we will not admit. He knows that there is enough bread and food to feed the whole world. He knows that our sin is in not doing what we ought to do to care for one another. He knows that we will be held accountable for what we do not do to alleviate the poverty where 1/3 of the world does not have food or water or a covering for their bodies. These are our brothers and sisters who are dying because they have no bread. It is both a physical and spiritual death.

The bread for which Jesus asks us to pray is to sustain life and remove worry and fear from all God's children. The bread we eat from God sustains us because we believe and trust in Jesus as our Lord. Amen?

Why do we need help in praying daily the Lord's Prayer? Isn't it because, if we do not pray, we forget who we are and who are neighbor is that Jesus wants us to love as ourself? We so easily forget this fundamental truth that we are our brother and sister's keeper. We need God to sustain us in this truth against all forces that separate us one from another.

#### IV

Another such separation that divides us from God and each other is **SIN**. I am not talking about murder or robbery. We don't see ourselves as a sinner in this way. The law puts a fence around us to protect us from these temptations. But, there is no law on the books that protect us from lying to our God, to our spouse, to our neighbors, or to our employers. These are not the lies that would get us thrown into jail. These are the lies that breakdown a relationship of trust. These are the lies that are more in our spirit, in our mind and in our smaller more deceitful actions. This sin is self deception as much as it is a deceit or lie to someone else. My friend of many years is an alcoholic. I love him dearly; but he can look me straight in the eyes and lie about drinking and not blink an eye. Children can lie to their parents about their hidden actions. There are so many ways that we can breakdown human relations with God and each other that we can't count them all. But, mostly the sin is that we don't believe in sin.

When Jesus says to us in the Lord's Prayer, *forgive us our trespasses*, Jesus is aware that we are bound in a prison of deceit to ourselves. We need the grace and love of God to find freedom and integrity to live alive with each other and with our God. The greater sin is that we do not show love and mercy and compassion to our neighbors in the spirit that Jesus

gave it to us. We are called to take up our cross and follow him. This cross is where we confront our sin that separates us.

## V

Jesus does not stop here to forgive ourselves alone. The prayer is to forgive others. What does it mean to ask and to receive forgiveness, if we fail to show this love and compassion to others? That is the story of the king who forgave his servant for a huge financial debt that he was never ever in his life time going to be able to repay. It was an extraordinary act of generosity on the part of the king to relieve his servant of this obligation and not throw him into debtor's prison for the rest of his days. You would think that would change or impact the forgiven servant to act kindly toward others, wouldn't you?

The story that Jesus told is that the forgiven servant had the power to forgive the debts to a much lesser extent to one of his own fellow servants. But, he did not do this. Instead, he threw this man into prison without any compassion offered. Now when the king heard about this servant's action toward another, what did he do? He called him to account for his behavior. Then he withdrew his earlier forgiveness of the servant's debt and threw back into prison.

We must remember though that this act of forgiving is not a tit for tat or quid pro quo action on the part of God. Jesus still died for our sins no matter what. He still offers forgiveness, even to those who do not yet acknowledge his work of divine love. God so loved the world – the whole world – that he gave his only son to die that whosoever believes in him shall not die. That will not be withdrawn; but what does it mean if we who are forgiven continue to act in mean and vengeful ways? Surely, forgiveness has not changed us. We have a type of partnership in this business of grace, don't we? If one side – our human side --- does not accept and become changed by this grace of God, then it may be as if it never happened at all.

This church and you and I in particular are given power to forgive. What we forgive is forgiven, what we do not forgive does not reestablish the love and humanity that God intended for each of us. We remain broken and separated from each other because of our pride and foolishness before almighty God.

The truth is that the body of Christ is a body of forgiven believers. My seminary teacher used to say that the church is nothing more than the body of "forgiven forgivers." Isn't that accurate. The linking of daily

bread to forgiveness is not accidental. We need the sustaining power of God's Word and Action to forgive and for us to live alive in grace. Without this nurture of daily feeding upon God's truth, we have no hope. We are like an arid and hot desert where little can live or survive. But with God's grace, we are like the Hebrew people who have been led through the waters from the oppression of slavery to the challenges and hopes of freedom.

I invite you this morning to pray with a renewed confidence and hope in Jesus that we will receive bread to survive and grace to forgive and be forgiven. There is much more to say about forgiveness. So, I am going to devote two more sermons after Easter to forgiveness. One will be on what forgiveness means to me. The other is what it means to others. A movie that may get you thinking about this is "Forgiving Dr. Mengele." Could a person who was subjected to the evil of a Nazi doctor be forgiven for his dastardly deeds? One holocaust survivor chose to do just that – to forgive her enemies; but it was not without controversy.

Come to the communion rail during the singing of the hymn, *Lord of All Hopefulness*, and find this bread of life and this power to be forgiven and to forgive. It is here for you and I to partake of. Amen.