

Give Us This Day

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[0 : 00] All right, well, good morning, everyone. Great, great to have you all here today. My name is Matt Collins, and I'm a part of the preaching team here at the table. And today, we're going to continue our exploration of the Lord's Prayer.

Just as a warning, we're going to try and do something a teensy bit different today. In theory, I'm going to talk for slightly less time than I would for a normal sermon. And then at the end, before we go into communion, I'm going to pose a question to you all that we'll discuss a little bit in small groups.

And it's not going to be a long conversation. We're not then going to all feed back and write notes on a flip chart. But I do want to lead out of the sermon into something a little more practical. And a part of that is that the Lord's Prayer, the prayer that we're focusing on, leans heavily into this idea of community and communal prayer.

And so that's really where I'm going today. And so a lot of what I'm going to be asking us to think about at the end is how does this lead us into communal prayer? How does this lead us into being a community that prays together?

Rather than, I sense here sometimes we're very good at sort of doing that personal reflection, being very meditative, being very thoughtful, dedicated to growing our own individual prayer life and walk with Jesus.

[1 : 12] But we don't do quite so much in community. So that's where I'm going to lead us to today. And so as I'm talking, I'm going to try and think about some of the answers to this question, and then I'll encourage you to think about some of it as well.

But basically, the question I'm going to try and answer from up here, and then the question I'm going to turn over to you at the end, is how does the Lord's Prayer, how does this prayer that Jesus taught us, and particularly the verse that we're looking at today, how does that inform our prayer life as a community in community?

So we'll come back to that question, but as I'm talking, be thinking that one over. So as Pastor Ansoni and Pastor Ternetta have done over the past few weeks, we're going to use the Lord's Prayer from Matthew 6.

If you have a phone or a physical Bible, feel free to pull it up. The prayer comes right in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount, sandwiched perhaps somewhat significantly between Jesus teaching about giving to the poor at the start of the chapter, and then fasting at the end of the chapter.

So today, we'll start in verse 5. We've read this passage a few times, but I think it's important to ground us in where we're going. So Jesus looks at the crowd, and he says, When you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others.

[2 : 31] Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go to your room, shut the door, and pray to your Father, who is in secret. And your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you.

And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them. For your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Pray instead like this. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

So, two weeks ago, Pastor Anthony talked us through sort of the context of the prayer as a whole, and talked a little bit about this idea of what it means to honor our Father God, and so all the complications that go with that.

[3 : 37] And then Pastor Tanetta talked last week about what it means for God's kingdom to come. What does that part of that prayer mean? So today, we're moving on to verse 11, and we're going to focus just on six words, which is deeply uncomfortable.

I'm standing up here talking about six words for 20 minutes. Verse 11, give us this day our daily bread. So, I've just read the whole prayer, but what I'm going to do now is I'm going to read it through a few times, and put a different emphasis on each word of that sentence, and then we're going to take a few minutes to sort of go through each word, and what it means.

Be glad this isn't Psalm 119, because that would take a lot longer. So, if it's comfortable, I encourage you to close your eyes. If that doesn't feel comfortable, just try and shut out what's going on around you, and let's go through the words of the prayer individually.

Give us this day our daily bread. So, open your eyes.

I'm not going to share anything you noticed. But some of what we're going to talk about today is how all of those words play out individually and how they come together. So I'm going to go through the prayer, and then we'll talk a little bit about what this means to do this in community.

[5 : 14] So let's start with the word give. It's pretty jarring. I don't know if anyone noticed this, but when someone stands at the front of the church and says, give, it can be kind of jarring. It can sound a little bit like a toddler who wants something, and they're just stood there saying, give, give, give.

Or maybe you're trying to get your dog to spit up whatever they just ate off the ground. And there's a risk that it comes across as slightly selfish, a point that we want to, I'm going to come back to that in a moment.

But as Pastor Anthony and Pastor Tinetter have explored over the past few weeks, these words come right after a couple of verses pointing us to God and to God's plan. Maybe this section, this give us this day our daily bread, is sort of the first part of the answer to what does it mean for God's kingdom to come?

What does it mean for your will to be done? Firstly, as Pastor Anthony said last week or two weeks ago, no one's hungry. That's the first part of God's will on earth, is that no one is hungry. And also, we as a community, we as people, are active participants in bringing about God's will, which Pastor Tinetter was preaching about last week.

And if we want God's will to be brought on earth, it's kind of valid, I think, to look to God to say, hey, you want your will to be brought on earth, we're kind of waiting for the first move from you. We need you to do something here.

[6 : 41] And that means we, as the people who are supposed to be bringing about your will, we need something from you. So to give a very imperfect analogy, a couple of years ago, I got a promotion at an old job.

During the interview phase, we'd sort of talked about all of the things that we wanted to do with this new position, all of the opportunities, all of the things that needed to happen. And I had a couple of things, I was like, these are some of the things that we need for this position to work.

What structures are going to be in place? What are you going to change about the organization?

And everyone was sort of like, yeah, that's great, that's great, that's great. And then when I started the job, it became incredibly clear to me that what we talked about wasn't going to happen.

That not only did I say, actually, if we really want this to work, we need a bigger team, the first thing they did was say, let's make this team smaller. Then I said, we've got all these really complicated systems, we need some training on it.

And they said, ah, sorry, we don't have any budget for training this year. I'm sure some of you have experienced something like that. And before you ask, yes, it was a non-profit. However did you know?

[7 : 49] All that to say that in sort of a small way, this kind of is analogous to the Lord's Prayer. We have this, we want your kingdom to come, we want your will to be done. In order for us to participate in that, you need to give us the tools that we need to do that.

You need to give us the things that we need. And when that doesn't happen, things fall apart very quickly. And perhaps unsurprisingly, I didn't stick around to that job for all that much time. I will say

this analogy isn't perfect, and it breaks down somewhat, because God's provision for us is very much not task-oriented or a quid pro quo, or sort of you do this and I'll do that.

But I do want to draw on something that's come up over the past few weeks, and that's that we are created in God's image. We are God's creation walking the earth.

We carry the image of God within us. And part of the answer to the question of how is God glorified through us is that we need to be cared for by God.

God's glory represented in us only makes sense if we are actually being cared for. There are several examples in the Old Testament where the people of Israel were conquered by opposing armies, and often the opposing armies or their priests would stand up in the ruins of the temple in Israel and mock God by saying, or mock Yahweh by saying, see, Yahweh can't be that great because we have conquered his people.

[9:07] We have conquered Yahweh. And so as God's image bearers walking this earth, God is glorified by us having our needs met. And there's some complexity in there, and if we have three weeks, we dig into that more.

But just to say this, a part of bringing about God's glory, hallowing God's name, seeing God's kingdom come, is that his people have their needs met. So the next word is us.

So we were going to talk about community. This is where we're going to start talking about community. So twice, twice in this really short verse, we're drawn back to this community of believers, to this word us. Sometimes we, you know, we can be told, you know, pray for the things you need.

But it can be hard for us, and certainly it can be hard for me, to avoid sort of getting into this kind of selfish idea of prayer. Just taking that word give, the first word, and going to God with, here's the list of things that I want you to give us.

But if we do this in community, a part of the things that we recognize that we need, we come together and we start to hear a common thread, or we start to hear, well, actually, maybe I don't need this, because we have that in community.

[10:15] Or maybe my prayer is deeply that, you know, I get lunch today, and somebody says, hey, I've got some spare food. Why don't you have it? So a part of it is that sort of old cliché that we are the answer to each other's prayers.

But I don't think that's all of it. I think if we pray in community, we are more inclined to think about what our community collectively needs. Kenji Karamitsu wrote in their booklet of Uncommon Prayer, they described it like this.

The way we pray can either anesthetize us to human suffering, or it can help us believe that God is deeply invested in our lives, our hopes, and our wounds, and the project of black liberation and the destruction of white supremacy.

Prayer has the potential not only to remember the power of God born into our minds, but also to faithfully orient us towards incarnating another kind of world. So as an example, maybe we're all individually in our rooms in secret, as Jesus says and then says pray together.

Again, maybe we're all praying in our secret rooms, and maybe I'm praying that the emergency dental bill that we just got, because our insurance decided, hey, we're not covering that, that was too expensive, we need to find some money to pay for that.

[11:38] And someone else is praying for a doctor's appointment with an in-the-work provider, and they can't find one. And somebody else is praying for a job that gives them health insurance, because they really need to see a doctor, and they don't have health insurance right now. And then there's a doctor in the room who's praying against burnout and how to survive in this horrible profession.

And all of us can be praying these prayers, and all of those are valid and real, and speak to our individual needs. But if we come together, one of the things we might realize is that actually, the prayer that we should all be praying is for fair, equitable, affordable, and decent health care.

All of the things that we were praying for were individually valid, but when we come together, we see these collective needs. We see how these needs are linked.

And that's the power of coming together to pray and to listen to each other and the things that we're praying for. So let's move on to this day, or in some translations, today.

Today, this one feels a little uncomfortable. In some ways, it makes sense, right? Give us today our daily bread.

[12 : 44] Those two words, obviously, today and daily, correspond. And if we're asking God for our daily bread, it sort of makes sense that we would need to do that today. It's also pretty well established in early Christian traditions that the groups of believers would gather daily and pray this prayer, the Lord's Prayer, and other prayers collectively over a meal or as part of a fellowship meeting.

And Jesus does seem to be encouraging us that prayer should be a daily activity. It makes sense to pray, give us this day our daily bread, not, for example, give us this week our weekly bread or give us this quarter our quarterly bread.

Let's come together and do this on a daily basis. And I do think there's value in that discipline of daily prayer. But if you stop for a second and think about what Jesus is saying here, Jesus is certainly suggesting in these words that God will meet our needs today.

And that does mean our real needs today. And I think a lot of us can collectively come together and say that doesn't always happen the way that we think it should. That doesn't always play out the way that, you know, this beautiful prayer sort of lays out that it will be.

And thanks to that, some of you may be familiar with this whole cottage industry of apologists and wise Christian thinkers who have given us such wisdom as to why the things that we needed today were not provided with things like, maybe that wasn't actually what you needed.

[14 : 09] Or maybe, maybe it wasn't God's timing. Maybe you're learning patience in this season. Maybe that's not helpful.

So we have this tension, right? Jesus is seemingly explicit in this model prayer that he's presented to us that we can ask and seemingly expect that God will provide for our daily needs daily.

And yet we can all come together and sort of see that that's not quite how this plays out. And that says nothing for, you know, the cries of those who are spending days, weeks, months, years crying for the delivery from oppression, for a genocide to end, for an end to enslavement.

And I do think there's something about coming together as a community and focusing on those needs and seeing how we as a community can build towards this arc of progress. But there's something, I don't know, there's something uncomfortable about this word that I can't quite resolve, and it feels a little uncomfortable to stand up here and say, I don't know what's happening here, but I don't want to tell you that, like, Jesus promises to give us what we need each day, and you ought to be like, well, that doesn't happen.

And I don't have an answer. Maybe I need to read some more of those books. But the reality is that we're called to pray daily, and Jesus says that we can expect our prayers to be responded to daily, but there's a tension here when that doesn't happen.

[15 : 34] So coming back to community with the word our, maybe, maybe a part of the answer to this sort of praying on God's time is coming together in community.

Maybe there is some sort of power in this daily gathering. Maybe when we come together, we do start to collectively see progress towards changing of oppression. Maybe I don't see my own individual progress, but I see communal progress.

Maybe I don't see myself getting better, but I see society getting healthier. And maybe a part of coming together into a prayerful community is to see our own agency and power, to see our own collective energy and effort around addressing some of these needs.

But I think there's more than that in Jesus' use of this hour. And that is Jesus drawing on this history, this biblical arc that God has commanded us throughout the Old Testament to ensure that his people always cared for the poor, that there should be no one that was hungry in God's kingdom, that the naked should be clothed.

And if you look at the critiques of the people of Israel throughout Scripture, when the prophets were railing against the people and saying that this destruction is coming because you haven't followed the word of God, rarely was the destruction because they hadn't worshipped in the right way.

[16 : 57] Rarely was the destruction because they hadn't done some sacrifice in the right way.

Often times, the prophets were saying, you have not cared for the poor, you have not fed the hungry. In fact, Ezekiel 16, 49, reminds us that this was the guilt of the city of Sodom, that she and her daughters had pride, excess food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and the needy.

The crime wasn't necessarily having wealth. It was not sharing it with those who needed it. There's a 4th century theologian, St. Basil of Caesarea, who's actually a really interesting guy if you want to look him up.

But he says this. He says, If someone takes another's clothing, he is a thief. Why would we give any other name to one who is able to clothe the naked but refuses to do so?

That bread that you are hoarding belongs to the poor. That money that you bury deep in the ground to keep it safe belongs to the poor. Or, as the kids are tweeting these days, if a monkey hoarded more bananas than it could eat while most of the other monkeys starved, scientists would take that monkey and study him to see what was wrong with him.

But when humans exhibit the same behavior, we put them on the cover of Forbes magazine. This hour, this collective, we are all to provide and care for each other.

[18 : 29] And there is a great condemnation from God throughout history of people who hoard up more than they need whilst others are hungry. However, in this context, I imagine that most of us are not in the position of the monkey who has all the bananas.

Many of us are more in the business of working to share out those bananas among everybody. But I also think there's another piece of this that maybe speaks more to us.

And that is that if you're anything like me, you have this tendency to take on all of the burdens, to take on everything that needs to be done. We try and do everything ourselves. And whilst Jesus' prayer and, frankly, his life and ministry was literally a full frontal attack on the sins of the rich and powerful, his drawing us into community also challenges those of us who may be type A, those of us with control issues, and those who think that they can do everything themselves, like me, for example, need to lean into community a little bit, let go of the things that we're carrying, share them together.

It is okay to let community care for you as well. So the next word is daily.

And again, I think this caution, continues this caution against hoarding, against selfish behavior.

And I think it's important to say this isn't sort of don't plan for the future, don't save, don't think about tomorrow, but instead calls our prayer life into this rhythm of focusing on what we need right now, focusing on the day ahead.

[20 : 08] Later on in Matthew 6, Jesus talks about, don't worry about your life, don't worry about what you'll eat or drink, or about your body, or what you will wear. Is life not more than food, and the body more than clothes?

Look at the birds of the air. They don't sow or reap or store in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. And are you not much more valuable than they are? And again, if we had all day, we could talk about the contradiction between Jesus saying, pray daily for your daily bread, and then 15 verses later saying, don't worry about what you will eat, for your Father will provide it.

But we're not going to do that today. But I will say this, that Jesus in this model prayer, in the prayer that he gave us, is calling us specifically to focus on what we can do today.

If, as Martin Luther King and others have said, the arc of liberation does truly bend towards justice, we have to consciously keep bending it each day. What do we need from God today?

What is required of us today to advance the cause of justice? What is required of us today to advance God's vision of collective liberation? So the final word is bread.

[21 : 21] And we've been sort of alluding to this, and I've used bread and needs kind of interchangeably as we've been through this. But I think it's important to say explicitly that bread in this context is not just literal bread.

When we think of phrases like breadwinner, we don't mean the person that brings the bread, we mean the person that provides for the household. And I think bread in this context can be read the same way, that bread is what we need to survive.

But before we go into thinking about this in the community context, I want to take a slightly subversive approach to this and think a little bit more about what our needs are, and then try and tie us back to that question of community.

So, most of you, I imagine, are familiar with this concept of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. In recent years, there's been this growing chorus of people who suggest that Maslow didn't actually come up with this hierarchy of needs.

He, in fact, stole it from the Native American Siksiria, or Blackfoot tribe. And I don't want to claim to be an expert on this, but it does seem that he probably didn't steal it in the truest sense of the word.

[22 : 28] What he did was he went and hung out with the Siksiria tribe for a couple of weeks, explored their concepts of self-actualization, didn't understand a word of what was happening, did not get it, went back and wrote it up, and then obviously didn't credit the Native American communities.

But I don't think he stole it, because he just got it wrong. And here's what I mean by that. So, I think on the screen, there's two images of the hierarchy.

The one on the left-hand side is the sort of the one that we're familiar with, with the sort of the basic needs on the bottom, and then we build up to these concepts of self-actualization and community actualization. The other image is how a Native American scholar, Dr. Cindy Blackstock, has tried to conceptualize the Siksika understanding of hierarchies of needs.

The Siksika tribe never sort of documented it like this, so it's a little bit of a sort of an imposing onto their concepts. But the reason that I highlighted this in this image is that what you see in the Siksika diagram is that the focus is actually starting on this idea of self-actualization, community actualization.

And when you have that self-actualization and that community actualization, then needs start getting met, and needs are met in perpetuity and more sustainably. So, for example, when Maslow was hanging out with the tribe in the 1930s, he witnessed what the tribe called a giveaway ceremony, where members of the tribe who had the most, who had gathered the most over the year, who had acquired the most wealth, would take great pride and great ceremony in giving away their possessions to the other members of the tribe to make sure that everyone in the community was cared for.

[24 : 20] And the wisdom of the Siksika tribe, like with the prayer of Jesus, suggests and I think encourage us to live into a place where we say, if everyone has bread, I get the bread that I need.

But if I only seek out the bread that I need, neither my needs nor the needs of community are ever fully met. When we come together to build community around meeting everyone's needs, we all get our needs met.

When we sit on the sidelines and just pray for our own needs, we miss the big picture of what the community needs are, how our needs fit into the community generally, and also we are left usually deeply unsatisfied.

So, we're going to take probably only five minutes. I posed this question at the beginning and we'll come back to it. We'll come back to it now. In sort of the people that you're around, say hello to the person next to you, to the people that you're sitting with.

Just for a couple of minutes, I want to draw us into this question of how does this prayer, particularly the Lord's Prayer, but particularly this verse, how should this, how could this, how does this inform what communal prayer at the table church could look like?

[25 : 32] So, there's a couple of ways we could think about this. How might we come together to pray? What does that look like? What are those spaces that we need? How do we build a community of prayer? How do we do this sort of idea where we come together and share our needs collectively?

And then how do we, as the community, build our muscle, for lack of a better phrase, to pray for collective liberation? So, I'm going to give you just a couple of minutes.

Turn to the folks next to you. Think about some of these questions and then Katrina will come up and lead us in communion. So, say hello to the person next to you. Talk for a few minutes and then we'll call you back for communion.