

Davidson College Presbyterian Church
Davidson, North Carolina
Rev. Shelli Latham
“Give Us this Day Our Daily Bread”
Matthew 6:24-34; Exodus 16:1-3, 11-21
January 24, 2010

Today, we continue our worship series on the Lord's Prayer. We've gotten the greeting out of the way, "Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name." And last week we wrestled, in with the meaning of the petition, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Today we move to the first utterances about us, that God will take care of us, give us what we need, that do God will, "Give us this day our daily bread."

And so we reach back into the Old Testament to a very real example of daily bread falling from heaven. The Israelites are free from slavery but lost and hungry. Listen for a word from God, from Exodus 16:1-3 and 11-21.

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A couple of months ago, we were sitting downstairs in the old fellowship hall for our Tuesday morning staff meeting. We'd taken our places at the mismatched, rectangular tables, vying for the folding chairs with the cushioned seats. And we were talking about this sermon series on the Lord's Prayer. We were also talking about my nutty schedule with a pile of trips all smooshed together at the beginning of the year. So Lib said that we'd choose my preaching Sunday first. Now, I'm going to let you in on a little secret: I wanted today. So we started ticking off the Sundays.

"Oh no," I said, "I'll be in Nicaragua."

"Um, can't. I'll be in Asheville on a mission trip with the youth."

"Well . . . I could, but that's the day after the ski trip."

"*Give us this day our daily bread?* Yeah. I think that weekend will work." That's what I said, but I was thinking, "Yessss. I got the best one."

I sat at that table and wrote a mini-sermon in my head spontaneously while the other pastors were wrestling with who would preach the *inferior* petitions. Man, was I ahead of the game. I'd look at one of those passages about the manna and talk about how God hears our cries, even when we're grumpy and whiny and ungrateful, and God provides.

But then, I found myself at the beginning of the New Year, tripping on my way to the latrine in the Nicaragua night and nodding off to sleep on a mattress . . . on a cement floor . . . in a cinderblock hut . . . in a place where God's provision seemed to have taken the long way or not shown up entirely. And then the earth shivered and lurched and our Creole neighbors in the Caribbean lost 2% of their population in barely a blink - so much rubble and suffering in a place

that was already poor to begin with. And that easy breezy sermon got a whole lot more complicated.

When I was in seminary, I was a Greek geek. Now, don't misunderstand me and think that I was a really spectacular linguist. I just liked it . . . mostly for the colored pencils.

Not everyone translated Greek in colored pencils, but that is where the *geek* part comes in. I would print out the Greek and translate above it with certain words in certain colors, and then come back and circle and box and star those things that startled or confused or inspired me. In the end, it was like Bible art, a treasure map with all kinds of intersections and subtext that I had never seen. It made the scripture come alive for me.

So I found myself on a mattress . . . on a cement floor . . . in a cinderblock hut . . . in a place where God's provision seemed to have taken the long way or not shown up entirely. And in the unbreathable black that confines you when you are beyond the reach of power lines, the prayer took shape in color, as real as refrigerator magnets clinging to the dark - "Give us this day our daily bread," in pearl and purple and red, scrawled on midnight.

This prayer that I have muttered and rambled and spewed without thinking, this simple sentence - just seven words that I naively and blindly and selfishly muttered as if it's all about me and my needs or wants or wishes. I had boiled it down to nothing more than "Please take care of me." But in the night with those words spelled out like electric paint on a blackboard - "us" and "our" so passionately purple, "day" and "daily" like red flashing numbers on an alarm clock, I couldn't pretend that this prayer was anything less than a terrifying mix of comfort and calling. These words that Jesus taught us are a courageous, risky prayer - a prayer for us, for all of us, that for just this one day that God will provide.

So, let's break it down a little bit. Jesus teaches us to pray, "Give us this day." This is a prayer for today, a prayer only for today that God will supply what we need. In asking for just one day's necessities, we are acknowledging God as our provider. We are saying we can't do it ourselves. But more than that, we are saying that we trust God so much that we will only ask for what we need right now. And when right now is past, God will reach out with what we need for the next bit.

I think our Old Testament lesson for today is the most simple example of God providing daily bread. Each morning bread appeared like the dew and each evening quail filled the camp as the sky turned orange and lilac with sunset. God provided for every single day, but it was impossible for the Israelites to take more than they needed . . . to stockpile and reap and gather into barns. Because no matter how much they scampered to collect, it always amounted to the allotted amount. And if they dared to save some for the next day or week, for retirement or just in case it turned sour and filled with maggots.

Sometimes I think I would benefit from some divine intervention while I'm gathering my daily provisions - that the stuff that I didn't need would just melt away. I could scurry and dream all over Target but somehow when I reached the cash register the royal blue nail polish, Kool-

Aid colored toe socks, and totally vital iPod accessory-of-the-day had sifted silently from the cart, leaving me only with fruits and veggies, a few whole grains, and a non-designer toothbrush.

In the Exodus story, it is impossible for the Israelites to take more than they need. They have to trust in God each day and have faith that God will be there each tomorrow. They don't have to know what enough is because it's impossible for them to take more than they need. But God hasn't placed those kinds of restrictions on us, and so I wonder if maybe we have to trust God more because we have to choose to recognize enough. We have to choose to only take what we need and to rely on God to provide. We say, "Give us this day our daily bread," but do we recognize it as a call to make ourselves as vulnerable as the birds of the air and lilies of the field to "not worry, saying 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' . . . [to] not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own." (Matthew 6:31, 34)

I love watching my friends with their children. My friend Kate has a way of simultaneously saying the rules and playing a fill-in the blank game with her daughter Callie. Kate will say something like, "We are going to have some lunch, and then we'll swing on the swings for 15 minutes and then we'll go home and take . . ." (long pause) to which Callie chimes in, "a nap." If Callie asks for more M&Ms, Kate will say something like, "You have had 5 M&Ms. I will put 5 more on your tray. That makes 10, and 10 is . . ." and Callie will finish, "Enough." Or standing in the accessory aisle, "You have one pair of sunglasses with stripes, and your Mimi gave you one pair with stars. 2 pairs of sunglasses are . . ." "Enough." When Jesus taught us to pray for our daily bread, he taught us a prayer, not for riches or excess or even peace of mind. He taught us to pray for *enough*.

Another set of my friends thought it was never too early to teach their son, Mason, about the myth of scarcity. When he was about 3, they would read to him the Dora the Explorer stories. Dora would head off on her adventures with her snappy backpack and trusty monkey, named Boots. And inevitably, her nemesis, Swiper the fox, would peak out from behind a tree ready to steal some essential for the journey. Now, for you non-Dora experts, you should know that it is possible to halt Swiper in his sticky-fingered tracks with the repetitive instructions, "Swiper, no swiping. Swiper, no swiping. Swiper, no swiping."

But things were different for Mason. As his parents would turn a page to show the sneaky fox lurking behind a rock, they would start the chant, and Mason would join in, "Swiper, no swiping. If we share there is enough to go around."

"Give us . . . our daily bread." In the opening week of this series, Lib called us to remember that the Lord's Prayer is a corporate prayer to "Our Father, who art in heaven." This petition for our daily bread is a communal appeal - for us, all of us, to have what we need this day. When we lift these words to God, we are acknowledging that our wholeness is tangled up with one another. We are asking not just for God to bless us but to bless our neighbor.

Daring to utter these words, we risk that God may call on us to be the answer to our very own prayer. When one has bread for today and tomorrow and the next day and the next year, and another's bowl is empty, we have forgotten that "if we share, there is enough to go around." We

have forgotten that God answers prayers. And sometimes the answer is God's comfort for us, and sometimes the answer to the prayer is us.

"Give us this day our daily bread," just seven little words whose power gets lost somewhere between "Our Father" and "Amen." But this is a courageous, risky prayer - a bold prayer that flashes like a shock of purple and red against the blackness of need. It is a prayer that calls us to hope in God and to act out of faith.

The seven words Jesus taught are easier to remember but no less gutsy than burying our faces in prayer-crumpled hands and swallowing back our self-sufficiency to finally sigh and exhale in naked vulnerability, "Please God provide for my needs today - just what I need . . . just for today. And help me trust that tomorrow you will take care of my needs for tomorrow. This prayer is not just for me, but for us - all of us - for *our* daily bread, a reminder that our destinies are tangled up together. And so in my trusting, I pray that I may risk. . . to be your answer to these words I dare to whisper . . . that I may recognize *enough* and I may take comfort that each day you give us all our daily bread, if only we will share." Amen.