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Give us this day ...  
Chapel in the Park United Church  
August 4, 2024  
by Rev. Dr. Paul Shepherd

Based on Luke 12:13-21 and the Lord's Prayer

So - how did you do with your homework? Did anyone come up with any new wording for the Lord's Prayer - or perhaps just one line of it - that speaks more directly to your own life and your own feelings? Is anyone willing to share their words right now? And if you are willing, perhaps you can also say what it is about those words that speaks to you?

[ask for input - online too]

[NOW attach laptop!!!]

As I mentioned last week, when I was reflecting on the Lord's Prayer myself, what I really got hung up on was the line "give us this day our daily bread". One of my hangups was what the word "bread" refers to - is it really just bread, or does it mean all food, or does the word imply all of the staples of life which might include employment with a living wage, personal security, access to education, reasonable housing, decent Internet, and being part of a community that cares about you? I was also trying to figure out the meaning of the word "give". Are we waiting for God to give us food as if Jesus delivers pizza, or does "give" mean giving us opportunities to work and feed ourselves? But I confess my biggest hangup was around the word "us". When we say, "give us this day our daily bread", who is "us"? Was Jesus speaking to individuals, or a group? And more importantly, who is "us" for us today?

In Matthew's version of the prayer, found in Matthew 6, Jesus tells his friends ... hang on, I'll read it. "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. 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" [Matthew 6:5-6].

When Jesus said, "but whenever you pray", who is this "you"? Is it singular or

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plural? Does it refer to Jesus's friends as individual people, or as a group? Similarly, in the phrase "give us our daily bread", who is "us"? There is a lot of evidence that in Jesus's day "you" meant Jesus's friends as a group. And by extension, "us" meant the early Christian community.

This idea is reinforced in Acts 4, where Luke speaks about how the Christian community is to share possessions. I quote, "Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need."<sup>1</sup> The early Christian community was really into sharing! But it was about sharing within their own little community. Sharing with whoever was already at the table.

I'm pretty sure that when I was growing up, I thought it was "give us our daily bread" because all of us - in the church - were actually praying in our heads "give me my daily bread". Because I wanted my own share of the bread. I'm not alone in this. Search online for images that match "give us this day our daily bread". And you find images like these. These images are all about food that we ourselves will eat. They are about food for those people who are already at the table.

[slide: 1 girl eating]

[slide: 2 girls eating]

[slide: couple eating]

These are gentle, friendly images. But they depict gratitude for what we have. They are not really invitations to share beyond our inner circle. In these pictures - and in the gospel - "us" means whoever is already at the table. But what if "us" includes more people. What if "us" includes people not already at the table?

Here's a quick quiz: How many of us sometimes pray the Lord's Prayer when you are all alone. When you are alone, do you say, "give me this day my daily bread"? Why not? I propose that even when we are praying the Lord's Prayer alone we should still pray "give us this day our daily bread" because that is exactly what we want and hope for.

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 4: 32,34-35

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Isn't it?

I mean would you feel that God had answered your prayer for bread if you live in abundance but you know that your neighbour is starving? Or, as it was so well put by the Prophet Muhammad,

[slide: Muhammad]

“One is not a believer whose stomach is filled while their neighbour goes hungry”. Don't we want the request for bread to be a request to provide bread for all people? Don't we want our God to share our own passion that everyone - including ourselves, our neighbours, and yes even our enemies - should have the basic needs of life met? “Give us this day our daily bread” includes me, but it is not only about about me. I believe it is also about those people not currently at the table.

I spoke with someone recently who told me that they had given up believing in God because they could not reconcile in their minds the idea of a loving God with the vast amounts of social and other evils that human beings live with. There is nothing new in that conversation of course. That subject is what theologians call “theodicy”, which is how we understand the nature of God, and the nature of good and evil. Those conversations happen all the time. But this person said something that was new to me. They mentioned the Lord's Prayer.

And this person pointed out that the prayer is probably prayed billions of times every week. And in this person's mind, God simply does not deliver on the request for us to be given our daily bread. To their credit, this person fully understood that we are talking about OUR daily bread here, meaning feeding the entire population of the planet. And this person was correct that the prayer is probably prayed billions of times every week, given that there are about 2.5 billion Christians and given the popularity of the prayer. And this person was correct that about 2 billion people are malnourished<sup>2</sup> to the point of greatly reduced health and quality of life. And this person was correct that the situation is an example of evil.

But I do not think the person was right to blame God. Because globally we do

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<sup>2</sup> Here's the breakdown: 1 billion are under-fed and 1 billion are over-fed, but the people in both groups are not getting adequate nutrition.

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have enough food. We have enough wealth. We have more than enough wealth. We just do not share very well. We (as a collective) have been given enough.

One problem is that we simply do not prioritize global hunger. It is difficult to estimate the cost to end global hunger, but a recent estimate is \$40 billion per year. That sounds like a lot, right? Sort of. But not really. Guess how much money is spent globally on the military? \$2443 Billion. So we could end global hunger with 1.6% of our global military budget. Let's be honest. If we had the will, we could do that.

But an even larger problem is the hoarding of wealth. Some people - people with no imagination - can only imagine hoarding more than they need.

When people ask God to give us this day our daily bread I sometimes want to just scream and point out that God has already handed out the bread, and we should be making the demand for bread - not to God who has already provided it - but to the people of this world that accumulate more wealth than they could ever use themselves who seem content to just hoard it. Hoarding wealth prevents many people from living proper lives while at the same time destroys the future for the hoarder themselves. And it is so discouraging that so many people with vast wealth lack any imagination for how to use it to help other people.

We have a problem in our world simply sharing the basic things that everyone needs.

Before we discuss sharing further, I assume we all know the difference between equality and equity. Since the Olympics are on, I selected some sporting examples.

[slide: equality]

[slide: equity]

And I do not want to sound too naive here. I am not assuming that wealth should be shared equally amongst all people.

What you think? Should people who choose to work hard have more wealth than others? If so, should there be a limit on the amount wealth between the most-wealthy and the least-wealthy? And if there is a limit, what should that limit be? Surveys have been done to answer that very question. Here are the results from a survey done in North America.

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[slide: desired disparity]

According to one survey, most people believe that a certain amount of wealth disparity makes sense. Some people do put in long hours working hard and some of us would rather not. This survey of North Americans suggests that people think the top 20% earners should have about 30% of the total wealth and the bottom 20% earners should have about 10%. That would be a disparity of a factor of 3. Does that seem reasonable to you? If you are not sure, I invite you to reflect on the fact that in the US today, the 3 individual people with the most wealth have in total the same amount of wealth as the poorest 50% of Americans combined. I tried to calculate the disparity and my calculator exploded.

[slide: perceived disparity]

Here is the disparity that Americans think exists.

[slide: actual disparity]

And here is the actual disparity. These charts actually paint a fairly rosy picture. When you break down the population into 5 groups of 20% each, the disparity is not nearly as pronounced as when you consider the top 1%, or worse, the top 0.01%. Those disparities are astronomical.

The pointless hoarding of wealth is what drives our story in Luke. Quote, “And the rich man thought to himself, ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?’ Then he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.’” Imagine that. The rich man had a problem because he had nowhere to store all his crops. The solution should have been obvious. Give away the excess, and then what remains would have fit into his barns. The man could have said YES to “give us this day our daily bread” by simply sharing. Simple. Simple to say anyway.

[slide: homeless Jesus]

I hope that some of you are starting to wonder where I’m going with this reflection. Because I doubt that anyone hearing my voice would say that they themselves are hoarding vast amounts of wealth. What is our take home message here?

I have a short answer and a longer answer.

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The short answer is what I said earlier. That we should be making the demand for bread not to God but to the people who are hoarding wealth. Go to demonstrations. Vote. Write your MP. Take some political action.

The longer answer includes reflecting on this image. This image is a picture of one of many statues that are simply called “homeless Jesus”. In this particular image, we see Jesus as a homeless person sitting on the ground with his hand out, waiting for a hand-out. We know that it is Jesus because of the nail hole in his hand. We know he is waiting because he is looking at the ground, not looking at the people walking past.

Disparity is a funny thing. Because if we compare ourselves to mega-wealthy people, we feel poor. Of course. But at the same time, there are people right around us who think that we have a lot of wealth compared to them. All of us can share something. For some of us it might be money. But it doesn’t have to be money. Perhaps we can share by teaching a useful life skill like mending clothes. Perhaps we can share by making ourselves available to listen deeply to people. Perhaps we can share by simply caring about others. All of us can participate in the call to “give us this day our daily bread”. Money has its purposes. But many people’s greatest needs are caring, connection, and a sense of belonging.

I guess I now need to tell you my own re-write of “give us this day our daily bread”. I suppose it would go something along these lines. “Given that globally we already have vast amounts of wealth, and food, and abilities, give us this day a heart for sharing with all people, including the lost and the least, our neighbours, our enemies. Help us to see our connection with all people. Help us to see that all people are children of God”.

I’m not exactly sure what Jesus had in mind 2000 years ago, but today I believe that the call to “give us this day our daily bread” is not a request for mana from the sky. It is a plea that all people would share better. Not only share wealth, but share opportunities. We all deserve the right to work for a living wage, in safe environments, and to be contributing members of society. We want equity, not a free ride. Isn’t that what we will be celebrating in a few weeks on Labour Day?

And now - to close - I want to leave you with a question to ponder. Because I

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have a tradition of leaving my congregation with something to think about before I take holidays. Here it is:

[slide: Jesus delivering pizza]

We sometimes think that “give us this day our daily bread” is about us sitting back, doing nothing, and waiting for God to give us food as if Jesus delivers pizza.

Well, embrace that image for a moment, even if you don’t agree with it. Imagine that we are just kicking back, doing nothing, watching TV, waiting for Jesus to ring the doorbell and give us a pizza. Have you got that image in your mind? Good. Now here’s the question. What might you do to give Jesus a tip?

Have a blessed summer.

*Amen.*