

GIVE US TODAY OUR DAILY BREAD.

At the Vancouver School of Theology Board of Governors meeting in July the John reading of the *Feeding of the Five Thousand* was the scripture discussed during our devotional time. We were asked to reflect upon and share our thoughts about the bread in the passage. John, a minister from Calgary, talked about how his congregation kneaded their prayers into bread dough on the Sunday before communion. They used a different loaf for communion of course, but the image of praying into the bread of life is a powerful one to contemplate. As others shared their stories I remembered my own experience of bread that drew me back into the body of Christ in a profound way – fed me as I needed to be fed – nourished me in a way I had not realized I needed to be sustained.

During my first year studying theology at VST our family moved from Edmonton to Langley to live. We rented the Presbyterian Church manse there between my sister's family in Aldergrove and my brother's in White Rock. Although we had family close by and were warmly welcomed by the church family in Langley, we missed our community of faith in Edmonton at Dayspring Church. I particularly missed my fellow elders as the session had been a diverse but nurturing and cohesive leadership group.

Steve was still working for Edmonton Public Schools at that time – creating an on-line learning tool for teachers, administrators and other district staff. Most of the time he worked from the basement office in Langley but on one occasion I remember that he went to Edmonton for a few days. He was there over the weekend so he worshiped at Dayspring. They celebrated the Lord's Supper that Sunday. When Steve got home he pulled an unimpressive looking package from his luggage and handed it to me. "This is from Janet," he said. "She wanted you to know everyone was thinking of you – that she was thinking of you."

It was a small chunk of bread – part of the loaf they had shared in Holy Communion at Dayspring earlier that day – *the bread of life*. In that moment I felt fully connected again to my faith family. I consumed the bread reverently and experienced the sacrament once more as if for the first time.

Bread has some potent images for us – the smell as the yeast does its work on the combined ingredients – the sound as the dough is pushed and folded and turned and pushed again – the sight and smell of the loaf in the oven, growing and browning to perfection – the taste and texture as we savour it fresh from the oven or cooled and graced with our favourite topping. It is sustaining.

Potent images of bread fill the biblical text as well. Whether it is in the Old Testament or the New – talk of yeast or manna or Jesus eating with sinners or crowds miraculously fed. It is no wonder that Jesus tells us to pray for our daily bread.

It seems a simple – straightforward and uncomplicated petition... *Give us today our daily bread.* However, William Barclay in *The Plain Man Looks at the Lord's Prayer* asserts that it "would almost be true to say that this petition is the petition about the meaning of which there is most doubt." He goes on for several pages to elucidate various translations and interpretations of the original Greek. He concludes that *daily* bread can be understood as bread for our physical being – bread to keep us alive – bread for our day to day existence; bread for our spiritual being – bread for our spiritual nourishment and growth; bread that is nearby – bread as metaphor for the simple, basic needs of life.

Not so easy and effortless to comprehend as we might first assume. It is likely not possible or desirable for us to separate these meanings in the prayer that Jesus teaches. *Give us today our daily bread...* means all of these and more.

Augustine would see this petition as a prayer for "the sacrament of Christ's body" in communion which in some places in the 5th century was celebrated on a daily basis. It was his attitude that it should be received daily and so in one sermon to those newly baptized and receiving communion for the first time he said, "You should realize what you have received, what you will receive in the future, what you ought to receive daily."

In our opening hymn, *Break now the bread of life*, bread is identified as spiritual food – the spiritual food of the word of God in scripture. *Give us today our daily bread...* recognizes that unless we are daily nourished by the word of God our spiritual selves are starved and stunted. And so we pray that our minds and hearts should be daily enriched by the study of and meditation upon scripture.

Jesus says at verse 35 of John chapter six that he is *the bread of life*. Our daily bread is nothing less than Christ – he is the one without whose help and strength we cannot live.

Yet it is a prayer with significant meaning when understood at face value – an appeal for daily bread – that God should give us the ordinary things that we need each day to keep body and soul together. Remember that just as we pray **Our Father** rather than **My Father**, we pray not for **my daily bread** but for **our daily bread**. The selfishness and greed of human society is precluded by this prayer – we are joined with the whole community, and in this global village of the 21st century we are connected with the whole world.

There are obvious and immediate applications to the problems of hunger, poverty, and injustice in the world. What is sobering about this petition is the awareness

that hundreds of millions of people on our planet do not have their daily bread. Upwards of 25,000 children die of hunger-related causes each day. What does Jesus' prayer tell us about this? *Give us today our daily bread...* doesn't mean 'us North American, mostly white, mostly well fed folk' does it? What actions or lifestyle choices accompany our prayer?

The *Catechism for Today* from The Presbyterian Church in Canada says that this petition acknowledges our total daily dependence upon God and asks for provision of the necessities of life for all people, especially for the poor and needy.

We do not ask for our lifetime needs to be met in one fell swoop. We are to pray daily for what we need – content to take the present and leave it in the hands of God. The passage that Dennis read from Exodus reminds us that God shows Israel that they have truly been delivered from Egypt's economy of scarcity and are now free to live in the assurance of God's daily provision. This is why they are prohibited from hoarding manna and warned that what is hoarded will rot – God will provide daily even in the wilderness – trust in God's abundant grace.

Give us today our daily bread... simple food that is enough. We are not encouraged to pray for luxuries. Bread – not delicacies and riches, not fancy clothes and flashy cars, not precious jewels and valued metals. We pray for what we need not for what we want – God is not to satisfy our greed but to assure us of abundant life in Christ.

Give us today our daily bread... expresses our dependence on God – our trust in God – and it challenges us to the effort and toil which will bring the gifts of God to all.

Our prayer for daily bread becomes a prayer for community within the body of Christ – recognition that Jesus is the bread of life – all that we might need or desire. Life with Jesus is life in the kingdom of God and that implies justice for all – including daily bread. It is a prayer that opens out to expressions of gratitude for bread received and for careful living so that all may be fed.

Give us today our daily bread... the bread to sustain our physical selves – compassion and will to participate in God's provision for those who are hungry; the bread of scripture to nourish our journey of faith; the *bread of life* – in sacrament and relationship – present with us always. **Amen.**

This Sermon Copy reflects the style of the spoken word rather than the written word. Allowances should be made for grammatical style and sentence structure that are characteristic of the spoken word. The Rev. L. T. Kavanagh, 2009