

Give Us This Day: 3. Give Us This Day
Matthew 6:9-11; John 6:30-31, 35
September 27, 2020
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One of my best friends in elementary school was Susan Blackstone. I met Susan when her family moved into our Milford, MA neighborhood and our family went over to welcome them. We quickly found out that we had a lot in common. The Blackstones had four children. The Billions had four children. Mr. Blackstone had red hair. Our dad had red hair. Both families went to church and had similar family values. And both of our mothers spoke with thick southern drawls. And you know those southern girls, they stick together! Our families became fast friends. One of my fondest memories of Susan's house was near the end of the afternoon, just before it was time to go home, the delicious aroma of her mother's homemade, fresh-out-of-the-oven, dinner rolls filled the house. And if I played my cards just right and lingered just long enough, Mrs. Blackstone sometimes gave me one of those rolls, with a big slab of melting butter to eat on my way home. There's nothing more delicious than that.

Since the beginning of recorded history, bread has been a prominent food in most parts of the world. Armenian lavash, Iranian taboos, Mexican tortilla, Indian naan, Scottish oatcake, North American johnnycake, Jewish matzo, Middle Eastern pita, and Ethiopian injera. One of my favorite places to eat is Panera Bread Company. "Panera" is the combination of two Latin words; pan meaning bread and era meaning time. Bread time!

Today is "bread time" as we turn to scripture where Jesus uses bread to teach us important principles of prayer. *Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread.* (Matthew 6:9-11)

This prayer was not the only prayer that Jesus prayed, but it was the prayer that he taught his disciples. It was a prayer meant to last a lifetime, a prayer to guide our journey, a prayer that provides an outline for our conversations with God. The first two petitions of this prayer (Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. And, Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven) are focused on God's name, God's kingdom and God's will. Today the focus shifts to our needs; our bread, our sins, our trials. It's only when we first acknowledge the presence of God and the terms of God's relationship to us – that we are ready to address our own needs. Give us this day our daily bread.

Bread. The Bible reminds us that bread is the staff of life. There are five references in scripture to bread as the staff of life. A staff is a walking stick, something to lean on. Without a staff we cannot move forward.

In most cultures, bread is a bare necessity for survival. The Bible contains almost 300 references to bread. We could tell nearly the entire biblical narrative through the references to bread. In the third chapter of Genesis, when Adam and Eve are sent from the Garden, God says they will eat bread. In the story of Jacob and Esau, when Esau sells his birthright to Jacob, it is for bread. When the Israelites experience a severe famine in the land of Canaan, the sons of Jacob go to Egypt in search of bread. And in time, the Israelites are enslaved by the Egyptians. But when Moses wins their freedom, the Israelites must pack in a hurry. There is no time to wait for the yeast to do its work, so they make unleavened bread for the journey. Once in the Sinai wilderness, the Israelites are hungry, so God provides manna because there is no bread. In the

New Testament, Jesus spends forty days and nights in the wilderness where he is tempted to turn the stones into bread. The religious leaders are upset with Jesus and the kind of people with whom he breaks bread. Remember the time when 5,000 people gather to listen to Jesus teach. It is evening and there is no food, but the disciples find 2 fish and 5 loaves of bread – and with the blessing of Jesus, it becomes more than enough. Then, the final night that Jesus gathers with his disciples. He breaks the bread and says, “Remember me.” Bread represents something more than physical food. And this morning, we hear the instruction – pray for bread. Let’s look at this verse in its parts.

Give us. In John 11, we are told that God will give you whatever you ask. Jesus said, “Ask and you will receive.” But how does this work? How does God give us? The Bible does not tell us how it works, only that God can meet our needs. In Matthew 6, Jesus says, don’t worry about what you need. *Therefore do not worry, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear?" For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.* In the Lord’s Prayer, what comes before “Give us this day our daily bread”? A reliance on the presence, the power and the will of God.

We are sometimes disappointed when we pray because we want God to do something immediately. “God, here is what I want and I want it now.” But if that’s how it worked, we’d never have to go to the grocery store, we’d just sit in our houses and wait for the food to show up. During this pandemic some of us have gotten really close to being able to sit on our couch and have food show up. But it’s not because God did it, it’s because we used technology and ordered groceries online. This method is super quick and it’s easy but there was a time when every waking moment was spent on survival – getting the food necessary for the day or storing up for the long, hard, cold winter. Gardening wasn’t an option. It was a necessity. Hunting and fishing were not sports. They were about survival. Where does this bread come from? From the farm to the grain elevator to the mill to the distribution center to the bakery to the store – and how many hands did it take? And God was in the process. God loves us and when we pray, we are praying for God to use us.

The United Nations estimates 25,000 people die every day as a result of illnesses related to starvation. Some wonder how it is possible to believe in a good and loving God when so many die of starvation. And yet the world produces enough food to feed everyone, so what’s the problem? God is in charge of supply. We are in charge of distribution.

As a result of COVID 19, Minnesota is expected to see a significant surge in demand for food this fall. The report, compiled by Second Harvest Heartland and McKinsey & Company, states the upcoming hunger crisis will affect over 700,000 Minnesotans in a situation reportedly not seen since the Great Depression. So what can we do about that?

This past Friday, for the 4th month in a row, Messiah members participated in the Pop-Up Food Giveaway sponsored by Park Avenue UMC in Minneapolis and our ministry partner, Iglesia Piedra Viva. This ministry distributes bags of groceries. This week, they estimated that they served over 120 families. Where do the groceries come from? You provide them. How does God answer the prayer of the person who arrives at the Food Give Away? Through you. God uses us to answer someone else’s prayer.

In October, through our 2nd mile offering, you'll have the opportunity to partner with Re-Member, a non-profit organization on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota that comes alongside the Oglala Lakota people to build relationships and meet the basic needs of food, water, clothing and shelter. And this fall, our Christmas Shoeboxes will be delivered to children on the reservation. God uses us to answer someone else's prayer. When I pray this prayer, I am trusting God. And I am being called to accountability. We are God's instruments to meet needs.

Give us **this day**. That is, just enough for today. But if the truth be known, we want more than that. We want more than we need because we don't know what will come and we want enough in reserve so we will not have to rely on God. When Moses brought the Israelites out of Egypt into the desert wilderness, they were hungry. Moses told them that God would provide and each morning God sent manna. God told them to gather only what they needed for the day, but the people were afraid there would not be enough for the next day so they gathered more than they needed and the next day when they reached for what they had gathered the day before what happened? They opened their containers and it had spoiled. God says, trust me each day. Listen to the wisdom we find in Proverbs 30:8b-9...*give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that I need, or I shall be full, and deny you, and say, "Who is the Lord?" or I shall be poor, and steal, and profane the name of my God.* Trust God.

Give us this day **our daily bread**. The Greek word for daily is *epiousios*. It appears only one time in the Bible and that's here in the gospels of Matthew and Luke in the Lord's Prayer. In fact, the word has not been found anywhere else in Greek literature. Maybe the word was made up to capture what Jesus was saying in Aramaic that was not easily translated into Greek. Most commentaries suggest an accurate translation of the word is "sufficient", the basic need.

Remember the story of Jesus in the wilderness. He was fasting 40 days and 40 nights and he was hungry. The devil tempts him to turn the stones into bread. The devil knows that Jesus has the power. And Jesus replies: People do not live on bread alone but on what? Do you remember – a relationship with God. That's how Jesus got through his wilderness experience. Or when he feeds the 5,000 who are hungry, it is not to amaze the crowd by what he could do with 2 fish and 5 loaves. It is to point to God. It's not just the bread – but more than that. Jesus says, "I am the bread of life."

John 6:30-31, 35: So they said to him, "What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.' Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

Bread that is not actual bread but instead has become a metaphor for something else. The bread that we need to survive, is to find purpose and meaning in our lives; to know joy, love, grace and mercy. Mother Teresa said, "The hunger for love is much more difficult to remove than the hunger for bread." So when we are praying, "Give us this day our daily bread," we are also praying for bread that satisfies the hunger in my heart. That bread is Jesus.

Some of the happiest people I know are the most generous people I know. They're not necessarily rich by worldly measures but they are generous beyond their means with their time, talents and riches. And some of the most unhappy people I know have all the possessions and money they could possibly ever need or want but they haven't figured out what they're supposed to do with it. They haven't found their life's purpose and nothing they buy will ever

fully satisfy the longing, the hunger, the God shaped hole in their hearts. Each of us gets to choose what our legacy will be. What is it that defines and describes your life?

This is where the “us” becomes more important than the “me”. We’re not praying, “Give me.” We’re praying, “Give us. All of us.” God answers that prayer like most prayers, by sending people. You and I are the instruments that God uses to answer another person’s prayer. But we’re not just to pray about the needs of others, we’re called to do something about it. “Faith without works is dead.” (James 2:17) and from Proverbs 22:9, *“Those who are generous are blessed, for they share their bread with the poor.”*

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services set the 2020 poverty level for a family of 4 at a yearly income of below \$26,200. And for an individual, that yearly income is below \$12,760. Most of us are not even close to living at the poverty level. Our life’s mission is to bless others and in doing that we can begin to realize our life’s purpose. This is what we are praying for when we pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.”

It’s been several months since I’ve actually seen most of you in person but the last time I saw you, I don’t remember wondering how many of you were malnourished. Very few of us have to wonder where our next meal will come from, or where we’ll find clean water or if we have a safe, clean place to sleep tonight. It’s only once these basic human needs have been met that can we address higher human needs of belonging, friendship, freedom, self-esteem and love. We need our lives to have a sense of meaning and purpose. St. Augustine said, “Our hearts are restless until we find our rest in Him.”

Jesus came to offer us what it means to be fully, authentically human. We meet Jesus at the breaking of bread. Every time we break bread, we should stop and say, “Thank you, God, for the food provided for me today but I also pray for the Bread of Life to satisfy my hungry heart.”

My hope is that what you found here today is a feast, a feast on the Word of God. But what about the rest of the week. What will you feed on? Are you hoping this meal will last until you come here again next Sunday? There’s not enough here to last. We need daily bread and God longs to give us so much more than what we want.

There is nothing quite like a warm loaf of fresh bread, or a warm dinner roll, but whenever we eat bread let it be a reminder of the One who sustains us, the God who longs to provide more than what we want. “Give us this day our daily bread.”

Let’s pray: Our Father, loving mother, parent, God, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread....thank you for giving us more than enough; more bread and fish than we can eat, more love than we dare to ask for. Help us to always recognize that these gifts are blessings from you and that we are blessed so that we can be a blessing to others. In Jesus’ precious name we pray, Amen.

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of September 27, 2020

Weekly Prayer: Fill my cup Lord, I lift it up, Lord!
Come and quench this thirsting of my soul;
Bread of heaven, Feed me till I want no more
Fill my cup, fill it up and make me whole! Amen.

Monday, September 28

Scripture: Exodus 12:39-42; Luke 22:14-19

They baked unleavened cakes from the dough they had brought out of Egypt. The dough didn't rise because they were driven out of Egypt and they couldn't wait. In fact, they didn't have time to prepare any food for themselves. The length of time that the Israelites had lived in Egypt was four hundred thirty years. At the end of four hundred thirty years, on that precise day, all the LORD's people in military formation left the land of Egypt. For the LORD, that was a night of intent watching, to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For all Israelites in every generation, this same night is a time of intent watching to honor the LORD.

When the time came, Jesus took his place at the table, and the apostles joined him. He said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. I tell you, I won't eat it until it is fulfilled in God's kingdom." After taking a cup and giving thanks, he said, "Take this and share it among yourselves. I tell you that from now on I won't drink from the fruit of the vine until God's kingdom has come." After taking the bread and giving thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Observation: When Jesus taught his disciples to pray "Give us the bread we need for today" (Matthew 6:11), he connected to memories of God caring for his people. Unleavened Passover bread reminded Hebrews of God rescuing them from Egypt (Exodus 12:1-18). It defined their spiritual identity: Only unleavened bread was eaten during the yearly Passover (Ex 12:8), a reminder to Israel that even when settled in Canaan they remained a pilgrim people. With the cross just ahead, Jesus expanded the meal's meaning for his disciples. Now the bread and wine would recall his even greater act, dying and rising again to set all people free.

Application: None of the gospels quoted Jesus, facing the cross, as saying, "I'll eat this with you again IF we ever get to God's Kingdom." For him, there was no maybe. Even as the darkness closed in, he was sure that in the end, love and goodness would defeat hatred and evil, and God's kingdom would become reality. When life's darkness seems to be closing in on you, how can Jesus' "until" remind you that the darkness never has the last word?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you delivered your people from slavery in Egypt. You defeated hatred and death. Keep me anchored to your power to lift my life out of the shadows and into your eternal light and life. Amen.

Tuesday, September 29

Scripture: Exodus 16:14-19; Deuteronomy 8:2-3

When the layer of dew lifted, there on the desert surface were thin flakes, as thin as frost on the ground. When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, "What is it?" They didn't know what it was. Moses said to them, "This is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat. This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Collect as much of it as each of you can eat, one omer per person. You may collect for the number of people in your household.'" The Israelites did as Moses said, some collecting more, some less. But when they measured it out by the omer, the ones who had collected more had nothing left over, and the ones who had collected less had no shortage. Everyone collected just as much as they could eat. Moses said to them, "Don't keep any of it until morning."

Remember the long road on which the LORD your God led you during these forty years in the desert so he could humble you, testing you to find out what was in your heart: whether you

would keep his commandments or not. He humbled you by making you hungry and then feeding you the manna that neither you nor your ancestors had ever experienced, so he could teach you that people don't live on bread alone. No, they live based on whatever the LORD says.

Observation: Amazingly, almost as soon as the Israelites saw how barren the forbidding Sinai Peninsula was, they began to long for “the good old days”—their days as slaves in Egypt (Exodus 16:2-13)! God graciously, miraculously answered their fear of starvation by providing food in a dramatic way. Moses commanded that they save a jar of what they called “manna,” making God’s wonderful provision a permanent part of their story.

Application: Jesus’ prayer (“Give us the bread we need for today”) drew on Israel’s desert experience. A few Israelites apparently tried to hoard the manna by building up a big stash—which didn’t work at all (Exodus 16:20-21). God didn’t provide a month’s or year’s supply all at once. God’s people had to trust God daily. When many of us have freezers and cupboards full of food, and investment accounts well-filled with funds, what does it mean for you to pray “Give me the bread I need for today”?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for the ways (sometimes through your caring people) that you have sent “manna” into my life. Help me to have a generous spirit when I have a chance to help someone else who needs it. Amen.

Wednesday, September 30

Scripture: Matthew 4:1-4

Then the Spirit led Jesus up into the wilderness so that the devil might tempt him. After Jesus had fasted for forty days and forty nights, he was starving. The tempter came to him and said, “Since you are God’s Son, command these stones to become bread.” Jesus replied, “It’s written, *People won’t live only by bread, but by every word spoken by God.*”

Observation: The gospel writers said Jesus faced a searching spiritual test. It focused on whether Jesus would use his power for his own good or carry out his mission in humility and service. One temptation was for him to turn stones into bread, to meet his current physical want no matter the spiritual cost. In answer, he quoted Deuteronomy 8:3, which referred to Israel’s wilderness manna experience (Exodus 16:14-21). The clash was crucial, but not close. It ended with Jesus’ crisp command: “Go away, Satan” (Matthew 4:10). With Scripture’s principles shaping his response, Jesus won decisively.

Application: Unlike Jesus, you likely never have to choose not to turn stones to bread. How are you tempted to use your unique abilities and powers for your own benefit, instead of building God’s kingdom by blessing others? How well do you resist temptation? If you don’t like your answer, know that denial or unhealthy shame can block God’s power to help you resist temptation. Ask a gifted counselor or pastor to help you. Facing inner struggles frankly can defuse them.

Prayer: Jesus, son of God, I face temptations every day. Plant the principles of your word firmly in my heart, that, like you, I might stay on God’s path and resist the lure of going my own way. Amen.

Thursday, October 1

Scripture: John 6:27-35, 41-50

Don't work for the food that doesn't last but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Human One will give you. God the Father has confirmed him as his agent to give life." They asked, "What must we do in order to accomplish what God requires?" Jesus replied, "This is what God requires, that you believe in him whom God sent." They asked, "What miraculous sign will you do, that we can see and believe you? What will you do? Our ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, just as it is written, *He gave them bread from heaven to eat.*" Jesus told them, "I assure you, it wasn't Moses who gave the bread from heaven to you, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. The bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." They said, "Sir, give us this bread all the time!" Jesus replied, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

The Jewish opposition grumbled about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." They asked, "Isn't this Jesus, Joseph's son, whose mother and father we know? How can he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" Jesus responded, "Don't grumble among yourselves. No one can come to me unless they are drawn to me by the Father who sent me, and I will raise them up at the last day. It is written in the Prophets, *And they will all be taught by God.* Everyone who has listened to the Father and learned from him comes to me. No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God. He has seen the Father. I assure you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate manna in the wilderness and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven so that whoever eats from it will never die.

Observation: The crowd sought out Jesus the day after they saw him do what seemed impossible. He fed 5000 people with what began as five loaves of bread and two fish. They remembered the manna (John 6:30-33). They thought it would be wonderful to have a king who could create bread on demand. Jesus challenged them to see that he could feed them in more important ways. As he put it in his Sermon on the Mount, "Happy are people who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness, because they will be fed until they are full" (Matthew 5:6).

Application: Jesus' prayer taught us to trust God daily. We don't wait for one of life's sporadic crises to pop up, nor do we think that we store up excess spirituality. In what ways do you (or could you) make it a part of your daily routine to commit yourself and your concerns to God? What specific needs or concerns can you entrust to God's wise, caring provision this day?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, the simple praise song Breathe says, "This is my daily bread....and I, I'm desperate for you." Help me to hunger for you as much or more as I hunger for a meal after a long stretch of hard work. Amen.

Friday, October 2

Scripture: Mark 6:35-37

Late in the day, his disciples came to him and said, "This is an isolated place, and it's already late in the day. Send them away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy something to eat for themselves." He replied, "You give them something to eat." But they said to him, "Should we go off and buy bread worth almost eight months' pay and give it to them to eat?"

Observation: This situation must have felt scary. It was late in the day, with no food trucks or drive-ins nearby, and a large crowd who had gathered to hear Jesus teach was hungry. Jesus' disciples, using human common sense, said, "Send them away." Mark said Jesus' reply, amazing and even alarming, was "You give them something to eat." But when they gathered what they had (which was clearly not enough), Jesus' power turned their little into lots of food to share with the hungry people.

Application: Note the contrast between how Jesus responded to the crowd and how the disciples did. "You give them something to eat" seemed to alarm the disciples. When you see people hurting, are you more inclined to respond like the disciples or like Jesus? What concerns or fears do you have, if any, about what might happen if you more often responded to suffering with active compassion?

Prayer: Loving Jesus, sometimes I get stuck wondering just "how" you produced all that food. Remind me that what mattered most was that you did it—and that your power is still waiting for the chance to work through me. Amen.

Saturday, October 3

Scripture: John 4:31-35, 39

In the meantime the disciples spoke to Jesus, saying, "Rabbi, eat." Jesus said to them, "I have food to eat that you don't know about." The disciples asked each other, "Has someone brought him food?" Jesus said to them, "I am fed by doing the will of the one who sent me and by completing his work. Don't you have a saying, 'Four more months and then it's time for harvest'? Look, I tell you: open your eyes and notice that the fields are already ripe for the harvest.

Many Samaritans in that city believed in Jesus because of the woman's word when she testified, "He told me everything I've ever done."

Observation: Today's passage came near the end of the story of Jesus meeting a woman at Jacob's Well in Samaria. He was at ease in Samaria, but his disciples probably weren't. There were centuries of hostility between Jews and Samaritans. Jesus must have amazed them by saying, in that hostile city, "Open your eyes and notice that the fields are already ripe for the harvest" (verse 35). But the fields WERE ripe—many Samaritans accepted Jesus' message. And Jesus told his disciples that doing God's will, reaping a harvest of willing followers, nourished him more profoundly than any physical food could.

Application: In the prologue to his gospel, John said, "The light came to his own people, and his own people didn't welcome him" (John 1:11). Later, Jesus told the religious leader Nicodemus, "God's Spirit blows wherever it wishes" (John 3:8). When you have welcomed Jesus and the light he brings to your life, how have you seen God work in unexpected ways in you? In the lives of others you know? Where, in your circle(s) of influence, do you see "fields ripe for the harvest" today? What excites and "feeds" you most about the ways in which you serve God and others? What would you like to get involved in that would deepen that joy and excitement? How can you begin to plan to make that happen? Messiah will offer a day of service on Saturday, October 24. Look for that sign up soon.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you said people who hunger and thirst for righteousness are the ones to whom your kingdom belongs. Grow that appetite in me—and then feed and sustain me as I join in your mission in this world. Amen.