



Daily Bread

Pastor Jess Scholten

Sunday, March 23, 2025

“Daily Bread” | Matthew 6:9-13 | Pastor Jess Scholten

One of my favorite books is, *Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives You Life*. (Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn, Matthew Linn) The book opens with a short reflection on World War II, which left many children orphaned and starving. When they were gathered into refugee camps in Europe, even though they were then being fed and were given good care, they could not sleep out of fear that when they woke up in the morning, they would again be homeless and hungry. No amount of explanation could assure them they were secure, until someone thought to make small loaves of bread. Every child was given one of these small loaves to sleep with at night. Holding that bread, the children could sleep secure knowing that today they had eaten and they would eat again tomorrow.

The purpose of the book is to teach the Ignatian practice of the Examen, a process of paying attention to where God is present and where God feels absent in our lives. You see the two loaves of bread (illustration of fresh loaf of bread – old, moldy loaf of bread). When my husband Tom and I practice the examen, we tend to use these two questions: What was life-giving about today? What was life-draining? But there are many options – the Linns suggest several, including: For what moment am I most grateful? For what moment am I least grateful?

When done regularly, patterns emerge... around which we can more fully understand and reorder our lives, leaning into that which is more life-giving, more of what God is giving us energy to do, and letting go of some of those places of desolation or at least re-orienting ourselves to prayerfully let go or adjust that which is not Spirit-led.

Doing the examen every day is like those children sleeping with bread—it is a reminder that God was at work in your life throughout the day and will be again tomorrow. A reminder we could all use these days! Find that which nourishes you and hold onto it!

Our Scripture passage leans into this idea as well, especially verse 11. God provides and God will provide again. The petition is for God to give us today our daily bread – to give us today the provisions we need to get through.

This particular request in the Lord's Prayer reverbs with so many bread stories – the prophet Elijah. My favorite depiction of Elijah by artist Cody Miller. Elijah, there in the wilderness, worn out from God's people, lonely, and despondent; and God sends ravens with food. Or even further back than that, when the Israelites were wandering in the desert. By God's might, Moses had led the people out of slavery in Egypt, and they were headed to the promise land, but they were hungry out there in the wilderness. God provided manna for the people with specific instructions to only take what they needed for the day – more and it would turn moldy, even wormy. (Exodus 16)

And Jesus and bread go hand in hand – his temptation in the desert – the suggestion to turn rocks into bread, the feeding of the 5000, blessing... breaking... sharing the body of Christ.

So, what's your daily bread? I wonder for what you're praying when you ask God to provide for you. What do you need for nourishment? When we pray that, we're asking for the provisions we need for life. And we pray it not only for ourselves but as a communal prayer: Give *us* this day our daily bread.

We don't pray for ourselves alone – we pray for daily bread for us all – for us as the body of Christ, for us as a community, for our neighbors near and far, for all of us. Give us this day our daily bread.

A few weeks ago, I went on retreat through the Center for Clergy Renewal at Holy Wisdom with a group of pastors with whom I've pilgrimaged the last two years. We have spent much time together listening for the Spirit of God at work in our lives. When we talk, it's about the really real.

But on retreat, we try to avoid politics – we're mostly progressive mainline Protestant pastors so we are dismayed at many of the choices being made by our country's leadership – choices that go against our very faith to care for the least and the lost, choices that work against our hope to dismantle structural racism and eradicate systemic poverty. Three weeks post-election, we couldn't resist at least expressing lament. But we also played several rounds of something like charades combined with the old telephone game, and I laughed so hard. And I realized I hadn't laughed in days.

It's hard to find joy when we know your stories of how the current administration is affecting your workplaces and all of our morale, of the fears that are overwhelming. I've literally watched some of you doomscroll and done a bit of it myself. We've had to figure out how to keep the building safe and secure for many of the groups that use it and how to better support our mission partners who are losing funding while trying to feed and house people and work for justice. It's been a lot.

But part of daily bread is not just what we eat – part of daily bread is that which gives us life. I will not again go so long without laughing. Joy is resistance. We need daily bread – those things that nourish our souls more than ever: community, meaningful conversation, active volunteerism, generous giving, creativity and art, and way, way more laughter. What is bringing you joy? What's on the menu for your daily bread?

Our faith calls us to balance – to joy and hope, to community and mutual care – to standing on a firm foundation of love so that we can reach out to those in more difficult and scarier situations and so that we can participate in faithful ways in the world.

We need daily nourishment of our bodies and souls to do so.

And we cannot ask the question of what sustains us without also asking the question: what sustains our neighbor? And let me be very clear – being sustained is not a zero-sum game. There need not be winners and losers – a just society means we rise together. The goodness that sustains my neighbor makes the whole neighborhood stronger.

This is why we pray for bread for ourselves and for others – for all of us are in need of daily bread. John Buchanan, a Presbyterian pastor and the former editor of the *Christian Century* died recently. I was so grateful for his thoughtful reflections every two weeks on that opening page, so I did a little search on my sermons to see what quotes or reflections of his might come up. I ran across this gem of story he shared in October of 2013, which he heard one summer while he was serving a tiny church in Scotland. (October 2, 2013, *Christian Century*).

The pastor from the next village told him how, “He was an infantryman in the British army in World War II and ended up in a prisoner-of-war camp in Poland. The conditions were dreadful. There was no heat, and prisoners were given a

single bowl of thin soup and a small crust of bread daily. Men were starving, sick, filthy, and desperate. Suicide was a very real option. All one had to do was run toward the perimeter of the camp and leap against the barbed wire fence. Guards would immediately shoot and kill anyone trying to escape.”

“In the middle of the night [this pastor] walked the perimeter and sat down beside a fence to think about going through with it. He heard movement in the darkness from the other side of the fence. It was a Polish farmer. The man thrust his hand through the barbed wire and handed my friend half of a potato. (breathe) In heavily accented English he said, ‘The Body of Christ.’” (“Shared Meal” by John M Buchanan, *Christian Century*, October 2, 2013.)

When we share what we have with others, it is as if we are remembering to share the body of Christ. It is knowing that people at all stages of life are also praying for daily bread – food, provision, shelter, hope, care, compassion, companionship, accompaniment – and that sometimes, these are things that we might already have to share.

After all, as St. Teresa of Avila, a mother in the faith and 16th century spiritual reformer has reflected: God has no hands but yours.
She writes (slide):

Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

Teresa of Avila (1515–1582)