**Lord’s Prayer 4 – Give us today our “daily” bread**

(Proverbs 30:7-9; Matthew 6:9 – 13)

Two weeks ago we wrestled with the 2nd and 3rd requests in the LORD’s prayer; “May your Kingdom come, may your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.” Before we move on to the next petition, I believe it is important to note that after recognizing who we are praying to, our loving Abba, the first 3 requests concern the character and purposes of God. God’s holiness and for His sovereign rule to come on earth, for heaven to come on earth. These primary requests help to put the next 3 petitions in perspective for they deal with human needs for the necessities of life, harmonious relationships, and our struggles with our weaknesses, our sins and with the power of evil. In some ways it appears that these specific prayers fill out aspects of God’s Kingdom coming on earth. Recall the 3 big dimensions of God’s Kingdom: The presence of God’s power to make everything right; God coming near to us in Jesus Christ to bring people into a new relationship with God the Father; and the formation of a new transformed community centered around Jesus who begin living as if God’s Kingdom has indeed come (an outpost colony of Heaven).

Today we explore the phrase, ”Give us today our daily bread.”

To fully comprehend its meaning, we must first do some detective work. We need a Sherlock Holmes or a Dr Watson on the case. Why? WE do not know what the Greek word behind our English translation “daily” means. The Greek word is “epiousios.” This Greek word has not been found anywhere else in Greek writings. The 3rd Century Greek scholar Origen did not know what the word meant, and he lived in Alexandria one of the 2 great centers of Greek learning in the ancient world. So, if Origen did not know the meaning of the “epiousios” how are we to discover it? WE do indeed need a Sherlock.

Our first step is to consider how the early church preachers, commentators and translators understood the word.

Some early Christian writers thought the word referred to time. For example, Cyril of Jerusalem in the 4th Century among others interpreted “epiousios” as meaning “today”. Thus we get the well-known English reading of “Give us this day our daily bread.”

Other early church leaders, for example Latin scholar Jerome, claimed the Greek word referred to tomorrow, giving us “Give us today our bread for tomorrow.”

Other early church leaders argued that the word referred to the quantity of bread we were to pray for, not a reference to time. Some claimed that followers of Christ should ask for just enough bread to stay alive, the bread of subsistence. Origen and 4th century preacher Chrysostom of Antioch opted for this understanding. Most Arabic speaking Christians in the Middle East today pray the Lord’s Prayer this way.

The Syriac church of the Middle East believed that this was too harsh and opted for “the bread that we need.” For our sense of wellbeing, we need a full loaf in the cupboard rather than 1 slice on the table. The 4th Century translation of the gospels into Syriac has this translation.

So our Sherlock Holmes type of enquiry of Early Church leaders and preachers gives us 4 options:

The bread of today; The bread of tomorrow; Just enough bread to keep us alive; The bread that we need.

There is one other source to consider; the Old Syriac translation which was made in the 2nd century. This was replaced by a later 4th Century translation and so the early one fell into disuse and was only rediscovered in the 19th century. Only 2 copies have been found, one is now in the British Museum and the other in the Monastery of St Catherine on Mt Sinai. Syriac is very similar to the Aramaic which Jesus spoke. The Syriac word used is “Ameno”; which is related to our word Amen. It means “lasting, never ceasing, or never ending.” Thus we have *“Give us today the bread that does not run out.”*

This translation includes “bread for today” and “bread for tomorrow”. It also covers enough bread to keep us alive as well as the bread that we need. All 4 of the early church translations are accounted for in this understanding.

Further “G*ive us today the bread that does not run out*” addresses a basic human fear; that of economic scarcity; that we will not have to live on in the future. One of the most crippling fears of the human spirit is the fear of not having enough to eat. What if I lose my job? What if I get sick? What if I am unable to work? How will we survive? Jesus teaches his followers to pray for bread that will not run out. Bread is the staple food in the M/E and symbolizes all that we eat. Jesus teaches us in the Lord’s Prayer to pray for all our daily needs to keep body and soul together.

There is a story from World War 2 that illustrates the point. Children in an orphanage could not go to sleep at night because they were afraid that when they woke in the morning, there would be no food for them to eat. Their fear of being hungry prohibited them from getting the rest they needed. The people who looked after the children decided to give each of them a piece of bread at bedtime. They were to sleep with their piece of bread. This assured them that there would be food for them in the morning. They would not starve. The children’s anxiety was reduced and they were able to go to sleep. They slept with bread.

Does Jesus want his followers to be worried or anxious? Recall his words later in the sermon on the Mount, ”Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear…. Consider the birds of the air and the flowers of the field….. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them.” “Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matthew 6: 25 – 34). It seems to me that this teaching of Jesus, assures us that God knows our needs, desires and longings, even before we ask. God is a generous provider for us. As we align our lives with Jesus and his purposes, God watches over us and God provides for us.

Recall Jesus provision for the hungry crowds when they had been with him for some time. He multiplied the bread and fish to feed the 4000 and the 5000 men plus women and children. Remember what Jesus did at the wedding at Cana in Galilee when the wine ran out? He provided a large quantity the best wine.

In praying for the bread that does not run out, we recognize and honour God as the ultimate provider. That God watches over this world and sustains the earth so that it provides for all God’s creatures. Psalms 65, 104 and 145 reminds us that God waters the earth and opens His hand so that creatures are satisfied with good things. God send his rain on the just (righteous) and unjust (unrighteous), (Matthew 5: 45). God is exceptionally generous! Our Sovereign God is good and is our provider of all the good things that we enjoy. The bread comes to us as a gift from God. It comes for the One who owns all things and has shared it with us in trust.

Matthew 7: 7 – 12 re-enforces the line in the LORD’s prayer, “Give us this day the bread that does not run out.” We are encouraged to ask for the things we need. Here again we perceive the generosity and goodness of God. God is good, all the time, all the time God is good. Loving human fathers know how to give good gifts to their children and often long to do so. How much more will God give good gifts to his children compared to our earthly fathers. Our God is both good and a generous provider.

QUESTION: Think of a time when you asked God to meet a need that you had and how God answered your prayer. Share with your neighbour.

 Think of an occasion in the scripture when a person asked God for some gift or event and God answered.

I have been wondering, Does God care for us and provide for us better than we can for ourselves? That is if we let God provide. What do you think?

There is more for us in this phrase, “*Give us the today the bread that does not run out*”. We are asking for bread not for cake! We are not asking for the luxuries of life. The Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Mammon have little in common. WE live in a consumerist society, and consumerism is powerful and seductive. Today many in the West including NZ eat better than the kings and queens, the lords and ladies of 200 years ago. Part of this is because the world has grown in our understanding of how to grow grass, crops and fruit trees and the mechanization of agriculture. WE have also become informed about a healthy diet and the calories or kilojoules needed to sustain our bodies. This is good. However, we also are prone to over-indulge, to eat more than our bodies need. The temptation is strong to eat too much salt, too much sugar and too much fatty food. Our over-eating and eating the wrong types of food is leading to a multitude of health problems such as type 2 diabetes and joint problems. We have an epidemic of obesity in NZ and it will make significant demands on our health system.

I am reminded of a scene in the 3rd Lord of the Rings movie, The Return of the King. The great city of Minis Tirith is about to be attacked by the forces of Sarron. The Steward of Gondor’s son, Faramira, rides out to engage the enemy with a small cavalry force. During this futile venture the Steward of Gondor, acting as the King, is in his throne room eating from an over-laden table, with the juices running down his chin and demanding that he be served and entertained while his son and the city are in peril. He has become obsessed with his own needs and comfort while his city and people are about to be overrun. Clearly this is an extreme example of uncaring self-indulgence.

In the sayings of Agur in Proverbs 30: 7 – 9 we read the wisdom of having enough. Having insufficient to sustain life carries with it the danger of taking what belongs to another and thus dishonouring God. Having riches, more than we need has the danger of becoming self-satisfied, of being subject to the thinking that I have earned these riches and deserve them. This is a perilous path and can lead to disowning the Lord. Think of the man who had a big harvest dismantled hi barns and built bigger ones to house his grain (Luke 12: 13 – 21). He then decided to eat, drink and be merry. He is called a fool.

Jesus teaches us to pray for enough, “*Give us today the bread that does not run out*.”

We pray for “our bread”, not “my bread”. Jesus’ followers were not and are not isolated individuals. We belong to one another. Our wellbeing is connected to those around us. One of the tensions in the early church in Jerusalem was over the unfair daily distribution of food (Acts Ch 6). The Hellenistic Jews were being overlooked while the Hebraic Jews received their daily food. The 12 Apostles met and asked the church community to choose 7 of their number, full of the Spirit and Wisdom, to undertake the fair sharing out of the daily food.

Later we read in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthian church that there was unjust sharing at the meal prior to communion. Some over indulged while others went hungry. Paul is very critical of this humiliation of those who received no food.

On an international scale, the nations of the world have made some progress towards one of the Millennium goals, that of eradicating world hunger. Not too long ago I read that now only 17% of the world goes hungry. This is down from about 30% some years ago. However, we face new challenges of feeding the population of the world. The fifth report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change predicts that earth’s rising temperature will reduce food production dramatically in many populous countries, for example China and India. Food shortages and starvation will result in unrest, mass migrations and political instability. Praying for our food and sharing our food is likely to become a much bigger challenge for us in the next 30 to 40 years. Please remember that the IPCC writers are conservative scientists making these predictions.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta provides us with an example. She wrote of an occasion of sharing food, “An old gentleman came to her house and said that there was a family with 8 children, they had not eaten and could the nuns do something for them. Mother Teresa took some rice to the family. The mother took the rice, divided it in 2 and went out. When she came back Mother Teresa asked where she had gone. The mother simply answered, “They are hungry too.” “They” were the family next door. Mother Teresa was not surprised that she shared the rice, but was surprised that she knew about the family next door being hungry. Mother Teresa guessed that this woman’s family had not eaten for a long time, and yet this mother knew in her suffering about the family next door. There was not “my rice” but “our rice” even when her children were hungry.

The prayer Jesus has taught us is to Our Father and for Our bread. Surely, we cannot have too much while our neighbours have too little. As God answers our prayer for bread, we are challenged as His people to share our gifts and resources with those in need.

QUESTION: Which aid agency do you support to help people in need in order that they may have their needs met?

Of course, this goes much wider that just food. People need adequate clothing and shelter and a safe environment in which to live. We need to consider our lifestyle, consumption and possessions. How many clothes do we have that we have not worn in the last year? Isit time to give them away? It is interesting that the size of NZ homes has increased significantly while family sizes have got smaller. DO we need to downsize to live more simply? How many “toys” do we have? Do we have more than we need? May I suggest that if we have not used one of our “toys” in the last year we should consider selling it?

If God has been good and generous in providing for us, isn’t God asking us to follow His example and be equally generous to those in genuine need?

Does this line in the Lord’s Prayer imply that all we need to do is pray for our needs and they will be met? Not at all. This is not a prayer for an idle existence. Each of us is to work as we are able. At one time, some in the church in Thessalonica stopped working. Perhaps they believed that God would supply their needs, and that Jesus return was imminent. Paul in his letter to the church was very clear in 2 Thessalonians Ch 3; if a person did not work, they were not to eat! From the very beginning (Genesis Chs 1 and 2) humanity have been given work to do, to care for God’s good earth that it may produce food for us to eat. Further, there are a number of scriptures that speak of God giving us the strength we need for living well. Isaiah 40: 29 – 31 reminds us that, “God gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall: but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not faint.”

God gives us strength in order to work so we may provide for ourselves, our families and our neighbours.

To conclude, our super sleuthing gives us good reason to believe that Jesus taught us to pray, *“Give us this day the food that does not run out.”*

This food comes to us as a gift from the generous goodness of God our provider.

We are praying for bread, not cake; that is, we are not praying for riches and for God to enable personal self-indulgence. We pray for enough to satisfy our need.

We pray for OUR BREAD not my bread. God’s answer to our praying calls us to imitate God and share that which God has entrusted to us.

Praying for bread is not an invitation to laziness, but we are to continue to work as God strengthens us for providing for our needs and the needs of others.