3/6-7/21 Lent in Plain Sight: Bread Rev. Amy Haines

Matthew 6:7-15 NRSV

What are your favorite memories of bread? I can remember my grandmother having bread as a part of every Sunday dinner. In Jerusalem I remember bread being present not only at lunch and dinner, but also every breakfast. Early in my ministry I was eating supper at a friend’s house, and instead of cutting a loaf of bread to fit on the plate, I simply picked up the loaf and broke it in half. She laughed, as I didn’t even realize what I was doing.

If you have ever fixed school lunches for your children or packed your lunch for work each day, you may relate to Jill Duffield who writes:

..I once calculated how many lunches I will have packed for my three children by the time they graduate from high school. Three children, thirteen years of school each, approximately 180 days a year, equals 21,060 sandwiches made, apples washed, chips bagged, napkins packed (some with notes written on them). Never did I imagine so much of my life would be spent packing lunches, planning meals, shopping at the grocery store, cooking. Making sure those we love have their daily bread takes time, effort, energy, thought.

Some days I liked the result and they did, too. Many days the daily bread I served was met with no less grumbling than that of the Israelites in the desert. Rarely did one of my children thank me for the effort or offering. Never did I tuck those juice boxes into their lunch boxes needing their appreciation. I wanted to feed them, grateful to have the means and ability to do so.

But one day recently I came downstairs to discover my youngest, now a junior in high school, making her lunch and her sister’s too. They were discussing the ideal ratio of peanut butter to jelly, noting their personal preferences: one likes more jelly, the other more peanut butter.

One turned to me and said, “Mom, you know the perfect amount of each.”

The other agreed. “Yes, you make the perfect peanut butter and jelly sandwich.”

Who knew? Practice does indeed make perfect, I guess. In that moment I felt delighted. Surprised by the appreciation of such a simple, daily act, one completed over and over again out of necessity, yes, but also love.

--Jill Duffield *Lent in Plain Sight* p. 19-21

Norman Wirzba reminds us:

The smell of freshly baked bread is enough to make people want to sit down, get comfortable, and enjoy several slices. The visible, aromatic, and tactile presence of a warm loaf invites sharing and companionship. If you go back to the Latin definition of companion, it breaks down to “one who shares bread.” Bread provides nourishment. Bread also communicates home, hospitality, and fellowship, the sharing of our life together. Received at the Eucharistic table as the body of Christ, it is our nurture into God’s communal life.

--Norman Wirzba, *Food and Faith*, Cambridge University Press, 2012, adapted, from thepastorsworkshop.com:bread

Bread comes in many forms—rolls and biscuits, wheat and white, cinnamon bread and raisin bread, buns and bagels, pita bread and French baguettes, tortillas and crackers.

We eat the grain of the field in many ways, at many tables, including [our own tables] today as we celebrate in the bread and cup of holy communion.

We began Lent with the bread and cup of God’s grace, as well as dust and masks as signs of our mortality, as during this Lenten season we reflect on ordinary elements to remind us of God’s ongoing presence with us. Then we reflected on oil to remind us that we are anointed for our faith journeys and called to be ready to follow Jesus on those journeys. Last week our shoes reminded us to be ready for mission, ready to take the next faithful step.

This week, we return to the grain and cup of communion, and bread reminds us how God provides for us, each and every day.

Each week in worship we pray: “Give us this day our daily bread.”

Give us the bread we need for today. Keep us healthy with three square meals today.

Give us today our daily bread.

This phrase is one line from the greater prayer we call The Lord’s Prayer. Yet, do we pay attention to these words which we pray?

Matthew 6 is a portion of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, words that call us to a different level of faith, a level known by honesty, humility, sincerity, and community. These words were never meant to be prayed as a rote prayer. Instead, they were given as a model for how to pray. They are meaningful for their profound simplicity, in contrast with the long-winded and babbling prayers of the leaders of the time who tried to one-up each other through their prayers.

If you ever say you cannot pray, begin with these words. Reflect on each line. Expand on each line. Make them your own. Our prayers do not have to be fancy or flowing. They can be simple and stumbling. They just need to come from our hearts. So even each week when we pray this prayer in worship, pay attention to the words we pray.

And remember—these are not only the prayers of our hearts, they are also to be the desire of our community. They are our prayer together, as God’s people. As Jesus’ followers.

Our Father, your kingdom come…

Give us bread for this day…

Forgive us as you call us to forgive others…

Today, we are invited to focus in on the line, “Give us this day our daily bread.” (v11)

Daily bread. How often do we take daily bread for granted? Many of us have enough food in our pantry, enough meals in our freezer, enough money to buy and eat three meals a day.

We have choices what to eat, or not eat, each day. Even if one’s body rejects gluten,

or we are trying to cut down on carbs, we all have choices of what grains will be a part of our diets. We don’t have to worry about daily bread.

How many of us get to trash night and realize how much food we have to throw away? Leftovers pushed to the back of the fridge. Produce bought with good intentions but never eaten. Bread that has turned green and crusty. How often do we waste more than what some people can afford to buy that week?

Over 14.5% of households in the state of Ohio are food insecure. They do not have enough money to buy enough food. They do not have access to quality or fresh food. They may pray “Give us this day our daily bread” not having any idea where that day’s food will actually come from.

This is one reason the churches in town are now doing food drive-thrus the first weekend of every month. Springboro United Church of Christ is open until 4pm today. Our turn to host will be in May.

“Give us this day our daily bread.”

For some people, this is a prayer for daily physical sustenance. A prayer of request and thanksgiving.

For all of us, may this also be a prayer to care for the community around us. To be aware of the needs of others and how we can care for one another.

“Give us this day our daily bread.”

This is also a prayer for daily spiritual sustenance. When we pray, may we remember that God is indeed with us each and every day, loving us, forgiving us, nurturing us, sustaining us. Are we connecting with God in prayer each day for our daily spiritual sustenance? Are we aware of God in the midst of our ordinary lives for our daily spiritual sustenance?

How often do we take daily spiritual bread for granted?

--Jill Duffield once confessed:

..When full days and crammed calendars represent routine seasons punctuated with times of greater or lesser stress, often thinking about my need, daily, for Jesus slips my mind. I readily recognize the importance of electricity, food, clothing, bill-paying, and transportation. I often forget the words of that hymn “Just Give Me Jesus.” I neglect the truth of God’s great faithfulness that reveals new mercies morning by morning. … I forget that Jesus is the bread of life.

--Jill Duffield *Lent in Plain Sight* p.34-36

When we forget where our daily sustenance comes from, we act more like the complaining Israelites wandering in the wilderness than the faithful followers of Jesus.

Remember the people following Moses between Egypt and the Promised Land? For 40 years God provided daily bread called manna. For 40 years God fed God’s people with manna in the morning and quail at night, only enough supply for that day, unless the Sabbath was the next day. No one could hoard. No one could deny they had eaten that day, unless they refused to collect God’s provision. Give us this day our daily bread. God supplied for their need.

God also supplied their spiritual need, daily reminding them they were not alone. Through cloud and pillar of fire, God led them through the desert wilderness. Daily they were reminded of God’s mercy, compassion, presence and call.

And how did the Israelites respond? They grumbled. They complained. They forgot to show and share gratitude for God’s blessing. They wanted to return to the bounty of Egypt, even if that meant working as slaves in order to be fed. They were hesitant to follow where God was leading them.

How often do we complain when our food is late in a restaurant? How often do our kids complain there is nothing good to snack on in the house? How often do we complain about what we cannot control, then complain about what we can control? How can ordinary bread today remind us to stop and be grateful?

“Give us this day our daily bread,” Jesus invites us to pray.

For physical sustenance, and for spiritual sustenance. As a reminder for this day’s physical blessings, however ordinary or elaborate they may be, and as a reminder of God’s ongoing presence with us.

When we pray for daily bread, let us also hear Jesus’ declaration in the Gospel of John, “I am the bread of Life.” (Jn 6:35)

How often do we hear those words and think about the gift of Holy Communion? How often do we hear those words and realize the gift of grace Jesus is to each and every one of us?

Jesus as the Bread of Life is our crucified and resurrected Savior and Lord. Like bread broken around the table, Jesus’ body was broken on the cross for our salvation. Like the hope of resurrection, Jesus is the promise of new life given to us for this world and all eternity.

Every time we break bread together we can give thanks for God’s life-giving, sacrificial love offered as a gift to us through Jesus. Christ is our daily manna, nourishment for body and soul, on our journeys of faith. Every time we eat grain in whatever form we prefer our ordinary meals can become means of grace, reminders of God’s presence and provision, whether we eat alone or with others.

I miss our times of fellowship around the table. During fellowship hour between services.

Before and after meetings. At church dinners. Those were times of companionship, of breaking bread and being the body of Christ. One day soon, we will gather again. Outside, in person, or hybrid, we are still called to be nourished by the gift of daily bread, the gift of prayer and praise, the gift of God’s presence.

In the meantime, let us give thanks as we gather for Holy Communion, with whatever bread is before us. Let us give thanks for this reminder of God’s provision of daily needs and ongoing grace. Let us give thanks for the holy mystery of Jesus as our Bread of Life.

May ordinary bread remind us of God’s extraordinary presence with us, each and every day.

Then, may our lives reflect the words of this prayer by Helen Otte:

Give us this day our daily bread: this is our prayer.

If by our grace you give us more, Lord, help us share.

We are your voice, your hands, your feet;

use us to show in word and deed

compassion to a world in need.

We thank you, Lord, for joy and peace, for loving care.

As you have loved us, help us, Lord, your love to share.

Then we will tell of living bread;

of Jesus Christ, whose blood was shed

that hungry people might be fed. Amen.

-PsH 290 by Helen Otte, 1986 © 1987 CRC Publications

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