

Thursday, July 9, 2020

It is “our bread,” not my bread

- Pastor Hank French

Give us today our daily bread (Matthew 6:11)

*Those who are generous are blessed,
for they share their bread with the poor* (Proverbs 22:9).

In the last four petitions of the Lord’s Prayer, our attention is drawn to human needs—our need for bread, our need for forgiveness, our need for rescue and deliverance.

First, we pray for “our daily bread.” Again, the little word “our” is worth thinking about. Christian faith is personal in the sense that we all stand personally before God, are all loved personally by God, and are all personally called to follow Jesus in the way of God. But Christian faith is not individualistic. It is never only about me. We always stand before God as part of both the community of faith and the larger community of humankind. Christian faith connects us to everyone. When anyone suffers, we all suffer, when things go well for anyone, things go well for everyone. As the 17th century English Poet John Donne so beautifully put it:

Any man's death diminishes me
because I am involved in mankind...

To be Christian is to be involved in humankind. In the Lord’s Prayer, we do not pray for “my” bread; we pray for “our” bread. We pray that no one would go to bed hungry, would suffer from malnutrition, would die for lack of “bread.”

The celebration of Holy Communion gives us a powerful symbol of what it means to pray for “our” bread. Have you noticed how the sacrament levels the playing field? The wealthy and the poor, the strong and the weak, the powerful and the powerless, those who have the “good life” and those for whom life is a constant struggle—everyone comes to the table of Christ and everyone eats. Everyone, regardless of their station in life, gets the same small piece of bread, the same small cup of wine. The “haves” do not get the whole loaf while the “have-nots” get the crumbs—as so often happens in the world outside the church. The bread and wine of Christ’s presence is food for the journey, and no one gets left out. When we pray for “our daily bread,” we are praying that the fairness and justice of Holy Communion would become the fairness and justice of our world.

Bread means bread—but it also means much more than bread. It is a metaphor for the material necessities of life. When we pray for daily bread, we recognize our dependence upon God for “bread,” for all those things that sustain life, that bring security, that make the experience of being alive a good experience. For all too many people, the experience of being alive is not a good experience. And that matters to God.

This life we live right here and now is a gift of God, but it is a fragile, vulnerable gift—we so easily suffer and die from want of bread—and so we pray for daily bread, for whatever is needed to protect the gift. In the Hebrew book of Sirach (written about 180 B.C) we are told: “The necessities of life are water, bread, and clothing, and also a house...” (Sirach 29:21). In our globalizing world, we might add to the list: health care, education, the arts, equal opportunity, freedom from political and

military violence, in short, whatever gives security, happiness, and meaning to human life. When we pray for daily bread, we pray for it all—for ourselves and for everyone else. No exceptions.

Prayer: Giving God, grant me and all people sufficient bread for the journey through life. Amen.