

Rev. Dr. Anne Bain Epling  
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Luke 9: 10-17  
Matthew 6:9-13  
3rd in a series on the Lord's Prayer

*Jesus, you said that the poor would be with us always, and they are here. On street corners in blistering 100-degree heat, in tent cities, away from the tourist attractions; They are here-women and children, young folks and old folks, some displaced suddenly, others who slid into the abyss that hides them from overly-genteel hearts. The poor are among us. Here they are, Jesus. Hungry and thirsty, in need of a doctor and a bath, desperation in a land of plenty, ragged and shoeless but criticized for not pulling themselves up by their bootstraps. Wake us to their humanity, O God, and shift our eyes from "us" and "mine" to these who are Thine. Amen.1[1]*

### **"Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread"**

I've heard the story of the feeding of the 5000, at least 5000 times over. What I never noticed before about the story is that when the disciples were done feeding the 5000 people they had leftovers. Leftovers!

Maybe it caught my attention because these days at the Epling house with 4 growing children, leftovers are rare. It used to be I could count on having leftovers for dinner at least one night a week. But not now. In fact, these days I'm buying more food than ever with less bang for my buck. Why, just a couple of weeks ago, I commented to the checkout clerk at the grocery store that no matter what I'm buying for the week, I spend at least \$200 on groceries . . .and usually I spend more. By the end of the week, the kids are complaining that there's nothing to eat . . .and usually there isn't.

So I am particularly struck by the fact that there were leftovers, leftovers, when the disciples were done feeding the 5000 people.

But I don't think I'm the only surprised by that. The Bible doesn't say it, but I'm guessing the disciples were surprised, too. After all, it was the disciples who wanted to hoard the bread for fear that they wouldn't have enough to feed themselves.

"Lord, send the people away so they can go and find food and lodging somewhere else," they tell Jesus after a hard day at the office.

To which Jesus replies, "Give them something to eat."

And to that the disciples say, "We only have 5 loaves and 2 fish, so unless someone's planning on making a run to the grocery, there's not enough here."

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*There's not enough.  
We need to hang on to what we have.  
If we share our food, we won't have anything left for ourselves.*

This was the disciples' mindset.

And if we're honest with ourselves, we'll admit it's often our mindset, too.

*There's not enough.  
We need to hang on to what we have.  
If we share our food (or our money, our personal possessions or what have you), we  
won't have anything left for ourselves.*

Four years ago, the New York Times Magazine published an article titled, "The Self Storage Self", documenting the fact that we are a nation of hoarders. Now, before I quote the article and make anyone feel guilty who has a storage unit, I, too, am guilty as charged. Because I've been known to have a storage facility or two in my day.

Also keep in mind that these stats are four years old!

So are you ready?

The United States in 2009 had 2.3 billion square feet of self-storage space. The Self Storage Association notes that, with more than seven square feet for every man, woman and child, it's now "physically possible that every American could stand — all at the same time — under the total canopy of self-storage roofing." Also according to the Self Storage Association, one out of every 10 households in the country rents a unit, making self storage facilities among our last national commons — places where nearly every conceivable kind of American still goes.<sup>i</sup>

In other words, storage units are the great common denominator among Americans.

That's a pretty sad state of affairs when you consider the idea that so many people like to say that America is a Christian nation. Because friends, if we really are a Christian nation, the storage business would be out of business. Jesus once told a parable that warned us not to build bigger and better barns in which to store our stuff. Jesus also didn't teach the disciples to pray, "Lord, give me this day my daily bread". Jesus taught the disciples to pray, "Lord, give us this day our daily bread."

In the Lord's Prayer, we are not praying for my bread; we are praying for our bread. In other words, bread is a communal product and a communal responsibility. The bread we eat comes from many hands' labors. The farmers in the Midwest, the bakers in the East, the delivery truck drivers right here in St. Louis, all make bread a corporate endeavor. No bread comes to our table without the work, the sacrifice, and the gifts of strangers.

St. Basil the Great made explicit in a sermon that nothing that belongs to us is ours alone, particularly that which we have in *excess* of "our daily bread". He said:

The bread that is spoiling in your house belongs to the hungry. The shoes that are mildewing under your bed belong to those who have none. The clothes stored away in your trunk belong to those who are naked. The money that depreciates in your treasury belongs to the poor!<sup>ii</sup>

When we pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," we are acknowledging that we have a responsibility for our neighbor's need. That indeed if we truly want to lay claim to being a Christian nation, or even a Christian, we would be giving our stuff away instead of storing it.

So one thing we should probably be doing at this point in the prayer is confessing that most of us don't think much about daily bread because, for most of us, bread is not a problem. Most Americans will die from too much bread rather than too little.

William Willimon, in his book Lord, Teach Us: The Lord's Prayer & the Christian Life, tells a story about a woman in a little village in Honduras who trudges up the mountain each day to gather and then carry down the mountain the sticks for her cooking fire. She then goes back up the mountain to fetch water for cooking the food. Then she grinds the corn her husband has raised, cherishing every kernel, hoping that this season's corn will last through the winter. The tortillas are made in the palm of her hand. She drops them in the pan, cooks them and feeds them one-by one to her children, the only food they will have that day to fill their aching stomachs.

That woman undoubtedly prays, "Give us this day our daily bread" differently from the way we pray that petition. And so, as Willimon points out, we ought to pray for the grace to be able to say, in a culture of overconsumption, "Give us the grace to know when enough is enough" or "Help us to say, 'No' when the world entices us with so much." <sup>iii</sup>

After the disciples set the fives loaves and two fish in front of the 5000 people, Luke tells us, "They all ate and were satisfied."

In praying this prayer, perhaps we, too, will learn to be satisfied and know when enough is enough and that the Lord calls us to share our stuff.

There's an old tale about a group of students who were spending a week at a Trappist monastery. At the evening meal, one of the students blurted out, "Hey, did we make this bread or did somebody give it to us?" One of the monks answered, "Yes."<sup>iv</sup>

To pray "Give us this day our daily bread" is to acknowledge that we are entirely dependant on God and other people for our daily bread, and that others are dependant on us for theirs.

When I first started this series on the Lord's Prayer, I said that to pray the Lord's Prayer is both radical and political. It's radical in the sense that we are praying for things that are entirely counter-cultural, like making sure there is enough bread for everyone -- and political in the sense that we are called to make it happen, not just talk about it.

I want to close with a story I read just recently about a minister who had taken a trip with other people. He writes:

We were on our tour bus, about to leave the dorm where we had been staying, when a few of us saw her. She looked about sixty years old, and she looked like she could have been my grandmother. She came quietly around the corner of the building, went straight to the big trashcan, and started digging out our thrown-away lunches. She put what she could find in a bag, and she was gone.

Sheltered life that I had led, I had never before seen someone using a trashcan as a food source.<sup>v</sup>

For those of us who pray, "Lord, give us this day our daily bread," it is our responsibility to make sure no one needs to do that, because as one theologian said, "If **I** am hungry, that is a physical problem; if my **neighbor** is hungry, that is a spiritual problem." (As told by John Buchanan, "The Economics of Faith")

Friends, despite what our society teaches us, there is enough to go around. The good Lord makes sure of that. But that can only happen if we are willing to share what we have rather than store it away. There are enough storage units in this country. But what there isn't enough of is leftovers. Let's try to change that.

Lord, give us this day our daily bread.

Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/06/magazine/06self-storage-t.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/06/magazine/06self-storage-t.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)

<sup>ii</sup> Willimon, William H. (2008-08-01). Lord, Teach Us: The Lord's Prayer & the Christian Life (Kindle Locations 951-952). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.

<sup>iii</sup> Willimon, William H. (2008-08-01). Lord, Teach Us: The Lord's Prayer & the Christian Life (Kindle Locations 928-942). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.

<sup>iv</sup> Willimon, William H. (2008-08-01). Lord, Teach Us: The Lord's Prayer & the Christian Life (Kindle Locations 917-919). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.

<sup>v</sup> <http://www.ncchurches.org/2010/09/proper-21-year-c/>