

Robert Vannoy, Lord's Prayer, Message #3

“Give us this day our daily bread”

I would like to continue our consideration of the Lord's Prayer this morning that I began sometime ago and continued in my last chapel. We come to Mathew chapter 6 verse 11 in our consideration of the prayer which is the fourth petition. The words of the fourth petition are familiar to all of you: “Give us this day our daily bread.” Often the Lord's Prayer is divided into its six petitions and considered in relationship to the structure that we find in the prayer itself. As I mentioned previously we note that the first 3 petitions are concerned with the things of God: his name, his kingdom and his will. The second three petitions are concerned with our human needs: our daily sustenance here in the fourth petition, forgiveness of sin and deliverance from evil.

Certainly we see the emphasis on the divine concerns and the human concerns, if you could put it that way, in the pronouns that are used in the petitions themselves: “Hallowed be *thy* name, *thy* kingdom come, *thy* will be done.” Then in the latter three petitions: “give *us* our daily bread, forgive *us our* trespasses and deliver *us* from evil.” So that that division is quite apparent even at a glance. I think it's significant in this respect, man naturally thinks about himself first. He probably thinks about himself second and third as well. But certainly he thinks about himself first and the structure of the prayer teaches us not to pray that way. But to pray theo-centrally, to put God first. We don't pray anthropocentrically. We direct our prayers with a God-centered emphasis not a man-centered emphasis.

While this division in the structure of the prayer and its petitions is quite apparent, it of course must not be pressed to mutually exclusive areas of concern. That is, God's concerns, on the one hand, and our concerns, on the other hand, as if there is no connection between the two. Remember the prologue to the prayer. The prayer begins with “Our Father, who art in heaven.” The Father and his children are not divided into isolated spheres of interest because the interest of the Father becomes the concern of the children and in reverse the interests and needs of the children are of great concern to the Father. Certainly we see that in human relationships and it applies as well to the

relationship between God and his people when that relationship is viewed as the relationship between a father and his children. So that is the essence of the parent-child relationship. The concerns of the parent become the concerns of the child and the concerns of the children become the concerns of the parent.

I think you have in the prologue to the Lord's prayer that which gives perspective to these petitions, much as you have in the prologue of the Ten Commandments. In the Ten Commandments you have the prologue, "I am the Lord your God which brought you up out of the land of Egypt." And certainly in that statement and the identification of God who is the one who delivered his people and been gracious to his people you have that which gives perspective to what follows--the commandments-- which are then to be the response of God's people out of gratitude for his mercy and his grace to them. The ten commandments are not some sort of legalistic sort of structure. They define the response of thanksgiving of God's people as they express that, for the grace that God has demonstrated to them.

So that, "our Father," to come back to the Lord's prayer, is that which puts each of the six petitions into their proper perspective. It is the child's interest and concern that his Father's name be hallowed. It is the child's interest and concern that the Father's kingdom should come. It is the child's interest and concern that his Father's will be done. Then at the same time, it is the Father's concern that the child's needs be met and that he be forgiven of sin and that he be kept from evil. So there is no unbridgeable chasm between the two parts of the prayer.

But in all six petitions we ask for those things that are of common and reciprocal interest, of common concern to God, our heavenly Father, as well as to us, his redeemed children. Because that is so when we pray "give us this day our daily bread" we do not do it out of self-centered interests. We do not ask that we may be provided with what is necessary for our sustenance merely so that we can enjoy life or so that we can live at ease or so that we can work out our own goals, plans and ambitions, so that we can be exempted from privation, from distress, from needs of all sorts. We don't do it simply for those reasons but we desire it for the sake of his name, his kingdom and his will. This

petition I don't believe can be prayed properly if that perspective is lost. We are only to pray "give us this day our daily bread" after having prayed what precedes "hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, and thy will be done."

You remember in Matthew 6:9 when the Lord introduced this prayer to his disciples he said, "after this manner pray." He gave the prayer as a lesson as something that was to instruct his disciples in the way in which they should pray. Certainly in the structure itself was one of those points of lesson to be found.

Now I would like to consider the petition by asking the following three questions: First, what is the petition? And we find that expressed in the word "give." Secondly, who are the petitioners? And we find that expressed in the word "us"—"give us." And thirdly, what is the petition for? And we find that in the word, "daily bread."

So first of all: What is the petition? In the wording of the petition itself we find that in the word "give." We may ask the question, how is it that we can say to God, give? I think we need to be careful here and I think we all sense that when we come before God and we say "give." It's easy to misuse or abuse this petition. In James 4:3, reading from the NIV, you read the following, "When you ask, you do not receive because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures."

What is praying? Is praying simply asking to give? When do we pray? Do we pray only when we ask God for something? Do we have, as many children have, that tendency to ask for this and ask for that and ask for the other thing? You don't have to be around children very long to realize that is something that is very difficult for children to overcome, particularly if you walk through a mall or a shopping center. Get me this, get me that, get me the other thing. Are we children like that to our heavenly Father?

Psalms 141:2 says "Let my prayer be set before you as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice." It's a very interesting statement, "let my prayer be as incense and let it be as the evening sacrifice." The person who really prays is not just begging, he's not just asking; he is at the same time presenting an offering. He's giving his prayers as incense, as the evening sacrifice. The request here to give should be as much an offering to God as it is a request to receive from God. It should be

simultaneously a request and a confession. I think you find in this request “give” also a confession of faith. And if that element is missing, the prayer very easily can be distorted or misused.

I think that in the expression “give” we have an expression of the deepest realization that everything that is necessary for the sustenance of life is dependent on the gracious gift of God. It’s very easy to lose that perspective. We live in what some have termed “a world come of age.” A world in which men through scientific and technical progress feel more and more independent of God. They feel more and more responsible for their own destiny as they feel they have the control of that in their own hands. As forces in the world that are destructive to man have been harnessed and controlled to a certain extent. God is being more and more forgotten and sort of pushed out to the extremities of our experience, relegated to fewer and fewer areas of activity. God is being relegated to the areas that appear still beyond the control of man that’s where you need God. But so much has been conquered by man’s technological progress that we don’t really need God in so many areas of our life anymore. That’s a very wide spread conception.

Formerly when someone contracted pneumonia or a disease of that sort there was only one recourse--you turned to God. Now we can go to the doctor and get an antibiotic and that will take care of the problem. Why do we need God? So that God in the minds of many is slowly disappearing in secular society and more and more being considered unneeded. We live in that kind of a society. We live under the influences under that kind of thought and that can enter into our thinking as well. We live in a very affluent society we are surrounded by plenty and abundance. We live in a country with the greatest agricultural productivity in the world. We live in a country with poverty plans, food stamps, welfare payments, unemployment compensation, social security payments, Medicare plans, pension plans and insurance policies. We have minimum wage laws. There is talk of a national health insurance plan, there’s talk of a guaranteed annual wage. There’s program after program after program to take care of people. With all of this one may ask are we still dependent on the gracious gift of God for the necessities of life, do

we need to ask God “give us this day our daily bread”?

It’s very easy to get the feeling that we are rather self-sufficient. We’ve planned we’ve taken care of these things, and God is sort a pushed out of the picture. How easy it is to feel that the industry, the sophistication, the technology, the rich soil, the climate, the great prosperity of this land is the source of provision for our daily needs. How easy it is to rest in stability in man’s ingenuity for a sense of security. We all desire a sense of security. We must focus that on one thing or another. Where do we focus that? Why bring God into the matter? Where does your security rest? Reflect on that. Does it rest in your job or on your bank account? Does it rest in the support that maybe your parents give you to help sustain you?

When we truly pray this petition and we ask God “give,” we are recognizing and confessing that God is the source and supplier of all our daily needs. If we truly pray it we are confessing that God is the source and supplier of all of our daily needs. “We live not by bread alone,” as Deuteronomy 8 says, “but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.” We don’t live only in dependence in what man’s work and genius can produce, we live in dependence on God. Thus we ask God “to give.”

In the time of the wilderness wandering, the children of Israel learned that lesson very clearly. They were sustained not by their own effort. Their clothing and their shoes were miraculously provided for them and kept from disintegrating. Their food was provided as manna from heaven, water from the rock and quail for meat were very clearly God’s provision for them. In Deuteronomy chapter 8, at the end of that wilderness wandering you have that beautiful passage that is a warning to the Israelites. I think a warning to us as well. In verse 10, we read in Deuteronomy 8, “When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which he has given you. Beware that you forget not the LORD your God in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command you this day. Lest when you have eaten and are full, and have built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied. Then [what’s the problem?] your heart be lifted up, and you forget the

LORD your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; who led you through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought. Where there was no water. Who brought forth water out of the rock of flint. Who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers knew not, that he might humble you, and that he might prove you, to do you good at your latter end. And you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand has gotten me this wealth.' But you shall remember the LORD your God: for it is he that has given you the power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he swore unto your fathers, as it is this day."

Certainly that temptation was not a temptation that is only to be relegated to the Israelites in the wilderness then to the new situation in the land. It's a temptation of all of us that feel that by our might or by our resources, by our devices or by our plans we find security or sustenance and forget that it comes from the hand of God.

We are reminded in the Old Testament in the time of Elijah of how dependent the land of Israel was on the grace of God. As Israel turned away and worshiped Baal in the time of Ahab and Elijah the prophet came and confronted Ahab. He prayed and it didn't rain for three years and six months. You can imagine the effects on the economy and on the food production of the land. Then Elijah prayed again and the Lord gave rain and the earth brought forth its increase, but that was dependent upon the grace of God.

Ultimately we all are dependent on God's grace for our sustenance. Our economy may collapse. I don't want to be a prophet of doom and I don't know what the future holds. But the situation is serious in this country over the past few years with the oil crisis and the resulting inflation and outflow of dollars and balance of payment problems. I don't think anyone knows, despite of encouraging words from encouraging government officials, what ultimately economically are going to be the results of our present crisis. We could be drawn into war at almost anytime. The peace in the Middle East is by no means a secure a thing. There are threats in many parts of the world. We don't know the future.

Our personal security may collapse around us by some unexpected turn of events

that touches us very personally. There are many ways things like that can happen and all of us whether very well placed as far as financial security or very poor. All of us must learn to lift up our hands to heaven and humbly ask our Father to “give us this day our daily bread.” And thereby to confess our dependence on him and to demonstrate our faith in his provision.

So I think first of all when we ask the question: what is the petition?--“give.” We should remember that it simultaneously is not just a request but also a confession. A request and a confession of our dependence on God for our sustenance. Secondly, who are the petitioners? “Give us” the pronoun “us.” It’s striking that in this petition as well as elsewhere in the prayer, we are reminded by the pronoun “us” of our ties with those about us. It’s not “give me.” You don’t have here the expression of an ego-centric individualistic concern, “Give me.” But it’s “give us.” Certainly the “I” is included in the “us.” But it does not stand by itself, I think that’s extremely important. We pray as one of the body with the knowledge that the needs and concerns of the one are the needs and concerns of the many. So that here the worker prays, for his employer; and the employer prays for his worker. Here the rich pray for their poorer brethren and those poorer brethren pray for the rich.

Now the implications of that are enormous. If we seriously pray that and, certainly we should not pray any other way than seriously, then we must act in a way consistent with our intercession, lest we show ourselves to be hypocrites. We must then be conscious of our responsibility toward our brother in need. Love for the neighbor in concrete deeds is here placed before our conscience as a necessity of consistency, if we pray this petition. I think we need to take very seriously those passages in Scripture which speak of our responsibility toward our neighbor who is in need.

I spoke to you, I believe it was a year or so ago, on Mathew 25:21-46 which is the story of “The sheep and the goats” in connection with the last judgment. We read there: “When the Son of Man,” verse 31, “shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory. And before him shall be gathered all nations. And he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep

from the goats. He shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from before the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me food. I was thirsty, and you gave me drink. I was a stranger, and you took me in. Naked, and you clothed me. I was sick, and you visited me. I was in prison, and you came unto me.’” What’s the response: “‘Lord when did we see you hungry and fed you or thirsty and gave you drink. When did we see you a stranger and took you in, naked and clothed you. When did we see you sick or in prison and came unto you.’ The king shall answer and say unto them. ‘Truly I say in as much as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren you have done it unto me.’ And then he will say to the goats, ‘depart into everlasting judgment prepared for the devil and his angels.’”

In Ephesians 4:28 we read, “he who has been stealing, must steal no longer; but must work, doing something useful with his own hands,” Why? “That he may have something to share with those in need.” We are not to be lazy. We’re to be industrious. We’re to work and we’re to reap the benefits of that, but why? “In order that we may have something to share with those in need.”

James 2:14-16 “What good is it my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds can such a faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him go, I wish you well. Keep warm and well fed. But does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?” James goes on, you’re familiar with that passage, to discuss what true faith is. True faith is demonstrated in works and faith without works is dead and it’s no true faith. Of course, we need always to keep in mind that works are not any kind of meritorious ground of our redemption, but they are an evidence and demonstration of the authenticity of our faith. In this petition then, “give us this day our daily bread,” we ask the question: who are the petitioners? It is “us,” and in that we are to recognize the concern which we are to have for those round about us.

Here a question of translation arises, literally the word translated “daily” is somewhat difficult to translate. The word occurs only here in the Lord’s Prayer in Mathew 6:11 as well as in the description of this prayer in Luke’s gospel. Nowhere else

in the New Testament does that word “daily” occur. It doesn’t occur in any extra-biblical sources either. So meaning by usage is difficult to determine. When you come to the etymology of the word there are differences of viewpoint on etymology. The best suggestion seems to be “bread for the morrow,” that is, “bread that is necessary or sufficient for the morrow.” King James translation is “daily bread.” So the petition is “give us today bread sufficient for the morrow.” The idea is day-by-day provision, thus “daily bread.”

Now, certainly I believe “bread” here is to be taken as a representative term, a summary of all that a man needs in order to do that which is spoken of in the third petition, the will of God. We just prayed, “your will be done in heaven and earth and give us this day our daily bread.” A summary of all that man needs, in order to do what is spoken of in the third petition, the will of God. I don’t think we should spiritualize the bread as it has been traditional in the Roman Catholic Church and to see in the bread Christ and then, of course, the mass. So that you daily are provided through the mass with sustenance. I think we are talking here about actual physical sustenance. So often the expression you hear: “do you live in order to eat, or do you eat in order to live?” I think a Christian has a very definite answer to that. We eat in order to live but not just to live but to live to the glory of God. We don’t live to eat, we live in order to work, work which is God’s will specifically for us.

So I think we should make it a tie between the third and the fourth petition. We confess our dependence on God for our daily needs and we request as children from our Father for that which will enable us to do God’s will. I think Jesus makes that connection clear in John’s gospel chapter 4, verses 31- 34. We read there, “Meanwhile his disciples urged him, ‘Rabbi eat something.’ But he said unto them, ‘I have food to eat that you know nothing about.’ Then his disciples said to each, ‘Could someone have brought him food?’ ‘My food,’ said Jesus, ‘is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.’” And I think what Jesus is teaching here is that things of the kingdom take precedence over the natural needs of the body. He exemplifies the warning of Mathew 6:33, “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be

added unto you.”

So the question remains what do I need, “give us this day our daily bread” that which we need in order to do the will of the Lord. But then the question is: what do I need? How do we determine that? That can be an elusive and difficult question. I’m sure you have reflected on it. What are the necessities of life, particularly in our complex society? Certainly our needs are different from those in more primitive societies. But how do we determine what our needs are? Do we look about us and compare ourselves with other people? If so, who do we compare ourselves with? We are all aware of the influence of advertising which is deliberately aimed at creating needs and certainly that affects us. Whether you turn the television on or look in magazines or read a newspaper you are bombarded with these attempts to influence your mind into thinking that you need this or you need that. We can easily be convinced that we need all sorts of things, all kinds of conveniences, all kinds of gadgets and the latest model of everything.

It seems to me, we can only approach and answer that question in relation to our task in God’s kingdom and that will be different for each person. We must pray only that we have those things needed to do that for which God has called us. There will be great variety there. God has called some to glorify him on the sick bed, and our prayer then is that God will give such persons the medical attention they need to reduce their suffering. That he will give them to peace of mind that they need to praise God in the situation which they find themselves. We pray that God will give a coat or shoes or vehicle or a radio transmitter to the missionary who has a particular work to do and who needs those things in order to accomplish that work. Give the pastor what he needs to do his work to carry out his visitation, the funds he needs to provide an education for his children. Give the students the books they need to aid in their study and to meet their basic living costs.

But remember we ask only for daily bread, that is, bread sufficient for the morrow, we ask for that today. Give us today bread sufficient for the morrow. We do not ask for guarantees that reach far into the future where we can plot out and look down through the weeks and months and know exactly how every need is going to be met. Our security is not in material provisions. It’s in the provider. It’s back to that confession “give.”

Mathew 6:25-34 certainly is a classic passage where Jesus says, “I tell you do not worry about your life what you will eat or drink or about your body what you will wear. Is not life more important than food and the body more important than clothes. Look at the birds in the air, they do not sew or reap or store away in barns and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? Why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin, yet I tell you not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you? O you of little faith. So do not worry saying: what shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or what shall we wear? For the pagans run after all these things and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.”

Now the clear teaching of Scripture is that we are not to be concerned for the morrow. The last verse of Mathew 6 in that passage is: “do not worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” We are to live as the Israelites did with daily provision--manna was for one day. It came a day at a time. It came as it was needed. Now certainly that doesn't mean it is un-Christian to buy a weeks groceries or to open a saving account or to start a fund for the education of your children. In short, to make every possible provision for needs that we can envision in the future and to plan and to act responsibly. Those things are good and proper to live orderly lives and responsible lives, particularly to provide for those who are dependent upon us. But we must not get hung up on such advanced provisions and then subtly shift the focus of our security to the provisions rather than the Provider. That's the danger and that is a difficult lesson to learn.

I think it's a lesson that I am still struggling with, the past five or six years have been very instructive in that regard in my own personal experience. It's been a very difficult lesson to learn but I have seen the Lord provide time and time again when I have no idea where the provision will come from for the next day or for the next week. Of

course, that's a tremendous blessing when you see the hand of the Lord provide in that way.

What is un-Christian is to live in constant worry and concern or to live in dependence on humanly contrived securities. God has promised to care for us from day to day, our dependence must be only in him. It's for this reason that he has taught us to pray in faith believing for that which he has already promised. "Give us this day our daily bread."

Let us pray. We thank you Father for your gracious, gracious promises. We thank you that you are our provider. We thank you that you are faithful to your promises. We thank you that you have told us to pray this petition – "give us this day our daily bread." We pray that you would help each one of us to pray that petition in all its fullness of meaning, realizing that as we pray it we are confessing that our security rests in you and in you alone and that we are looking to you to provide that which we need in order to serve you well. For we ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.

Transcribed by Stevie Capuzziello
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