The Lord’s Prayer
Matthew 6:9-13

“Pray then like this: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

Introduction

The Lord’s prayer is basically a summary of the mission of Jesus, the grand narrative of the Kingdom of God, and therefore the narrative of the nation of Israel.
In the last two Sundays, we explored first Jesus teaching us to pray; *Our Father in heaven, hallow be your name*. Following next Jesus taught us to pray, *Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven*. Third Jesus teaches us to pray, *Give us this day our daily bread*. This is what we covered last Sunday and it is what we are praying this week as we approach Christ’s-mass; *Give us this day our daily bread*.

N. T. Wright, one of the leading theologian of our times, is recorded to saying regarding this part of the Lord’s prayer; “The danger with the prayer for bread is that we get there too soon.” Because “bread” represents our urgent needs, or most of the times, wants. Once we get there we have a shopping list to read before the Lord.

We need to keep this in mind given our materialistic driven society today. If we don’t spend time adoring our Father in heaven, seeking the honor of His name, and praying for His kingdom, all our own desires and hopes will simply present themselves to us in a muddled and jumbled fashion, coming bubbling up to the surface every time we come to the Father in prayer.

So, in order to understand this part of the prayer, we need to
go back to the life of Jesus and the history of Israel, especially in the times of the Exodus. This will
gives us the context in how to put our needs within the contexts of the Kingdom of God. In the
following we’ll look at the Background or the Context of the Lord’s Prayer especial the line; Give us
this day our daily bread.

I. Setting the Scene

First, the background of the “Give us this day our daily bread.” During Jesus’ time, his opponents did
not have much good to say about him. They at one time called him the son of the devil, after healing
someone of their demonic sickness. But the favorite one was, they say, he is a ‘glutton and a
winebibber’ or someone who loves to drink alcohol. You can just see his opponents rolling that one
round their tongues with relish.

But do you know where the phrase ‘glutton and a winebibber’ comes from? It’s actually a quotation
from Deuteronomy 21, in which the Israelites are told what to do with a stubborn and rebellious sons.
The parents are to bring him to the elders of the town, and say ‘This son of ours is stubborn and
rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a glutton and a winebibber’, and they must stone him to death.
So there was more to the charge against Jesus than just that he went to too many parties. It was a way
of saying; he is being profoundly disloyal to our traditions; he deserves to die.

Yet, Jesus was just following the agenda he set out in the Lord’s Prayer. He wasn’t a rebellious son; he
was loyal to the one he called, ‘Father.” His eating and drinking with this outcast collection of friends
was a deliberate sign of the Kingdom. His parties weren’t simply a matter of cracking open another
bottle for the sake of it; and the prayer to the Father for daily bread was part of his wider and deeper
agenda. At the heart of it stood a central biblical symbol of the kingdom of God; the great festive
banquet which God has prepared for His people.

The picture goes back to time of Exodus when God was leading the nation of Israel to land “flowing
with milk and honey;’ to the King David in Psalms 23; ‘Thou shalt prepare a table before me, in the
presence of my foes'; to the children of Israel, being fed with quails and manna in the wilderness; to
prophecies like that of Isaiah 25:6-8;

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine,
of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.
And he will swallow up on this mountain
the covering that is cast over all peoples,
the veil that is spread over all nations.
He will swallow up death forever;
and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces,
and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth,
for the Lord has spoken.

The banquet, the party, is a sign that God is acting at last, to rescue his people and wipe away all tears
from all eyes.
**Why did this upset Jesus’ Oppositions?**

For starters, according to the Jews of the Jesus’ time, Jesus was celebrating with all the wrong people. For example, the Gospel of Luke tells us; “Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them” (Luke 15:1-2).

It wasn’t just the eating with sinners that frustrated Jesus’ opponents, it was the timing of when Jesus ate with sinners and tax collectors. Jesus often ate with sinners and tax collectors during a time when the Jewish people were fasting to celebrate a particular sad moment of the history of note nation of Israel. Jesus refused to fast on those sad days instead he threw a party.

In our modern times, in Hong Kong, it would be like Jesus, not attending Church on Sundays, instead He goes down to Lai Kwai Fong, seats around the bars and starts talking with whom we consider sinners. Not only did Jesus when to where the sinners were, but he also invited them in and dine with them. Every time Jesus ate with sinners, he was celebrating the great wedding-banquet of the Kingdom of God. Therefore the prayer he gave his followers, The Lord’s Prayer, was a prayer for the complete fulfillment of that Kingdom: for God’s people to be rescued from hunger, guilt and fear. ‘Give us this day our daily bread.’ means, in this setting, ‘Let the party continue.’

**II. What Does It Mean?**

Second, what did Jesus meant when he taught His disciples to pray; *Give us this day our daily bread*? Bread represent the physical needs of the Israelites during the time of the Exodus. During Jesus’ times the nation of Israel was still under the captivity of the Roman Empire. In fact, they have been in captivity now for over four hundred years ever since God allowed the Babylonians to conquer them. Still, in Jesus’ time, the Jews were not free, they have been humiliated by the Romans from time to time, and they are tied of waiting.

So what were they waiting for, for over four hundred years? The Jewish religious leaders of Jesus’ time were waiting for what Daniel prayed for to come to pass. Daniel tells us in chapter 9 that he have been praying for the restoration of Israel asking the Lord, when will He forgive the sins of the nation of Israel and restore Israel again. Daniel writes, that the angel Gabriel came down and told him that he had good news and bad news. The good news is that God will forgive and restore the nation of Israel once again. The bad news is that its going to take 490 years before this is fulfilled.

So in Jesus’ time, the Jewish priests were counting the dates of when the 490 years will end, and they knew that the end was drawing near. They knew that God was about to enter their world to first forgive their sins, and then to restore their nation to former glory. They knew this because God had spoken to them through Daniel. God revealed to Daniel that at the end of 490 years the “anointed one” will atone for iniquity of Israel and the world, and bring everlasting “righteousness” to Israel and to the world.

Jesus then comes into the picture. He understood the prophecy of Daniel. He knew His calling from the Father and that was; the fulfillment of the climax of the narrative of the nation of Israel foretold
by Daniel, Isaiah and throughout the Torah, the Hebrew Bible. The Jews, were waiting for God to come and dwell among them and save them as Daniel spoke about, but they overlooked the fact that Jesus was and is the God they have been waiting for. This is the heart of the Gospel, God coming to earth to become King through our Lord Jesus Christ. Everything else, the cross, salvation, healing, is built around this narrative of the King and His Kingdom.

Jesus is now in the picture, and He is trying to convince the Israelites of who He is. Jesus used different symbols to communicate his Messianic calling to the nation of Israel but tied to the story of Israel. Symbols such as “light,” “lamb,” “word,” “water,” etc. Each of these symbols are key symbols of the Exodus narrative of the Kingdom of God.

One of the key symbols Jesus used to communicate His Messianic calling to His fellow Jews was the symbol of “bread.” In Exodus 16, Moses writes about a time when the Israelites would rather be slaves in Egypt and eat meat, compare to the freedom they now have in the Lord;

> And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and the people of Israel said to them, “Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not.”

Jesus took on these symbols, in this case, bread, and replace it with Himself. In John 6, after he fed the five thousand, Jesus escaped to a place to be alone with his disciples, yet the crowd found him. Jesus tells the crowd, you look for me not because of the “signs” I just perform before your eyes, but because you want more. Jesus then tells the crowd don’t work for food that “perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you” (John 6:27).

The crowd then ask Jesus; “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?” Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” Then the they asked Jesus what signs do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform?

Jesus then said to them;

> Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’

> Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.” Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst (John 6:31-35).

Jesus is the bread of life meaning that believing Him will meant freedom from all the things that hold us captive under the power of the evil one. Jesus the bread of life is the final Exodus that the nation of Israel have been waiting for, for 490 years.

This then, what it means for Jesus’ disciples to pray; *Give us this day our daily bread.*
III. Our Respond to the Kingdom Call

Third and our final question is; how should I pray, give us this day our daily bread, in my life today? Let me offer three suggestions.

1. Praying for Specific Needs

The first suggestion is that this clause of the Lord's prayer reminds us that God intends for us to pray for specific needs.

Let's look into our hearts this morning and ask ourselves; “What is my deepest desire? Scripture is full of stories of people who brought their deep natural longings into the presence of God, and found them answered by being taken up within his purposes.

- Naomi longed that her daughter-in-law Ruth might have a husband; God, answering that longing, made Ruth the great-grandmother of King David, the man after his own heart.
- Hannah longed for a child; God gave her Samuel, who would become his mouthpiece to Israel.
- The disciples, in Acts 1, were longing for Israel to become the world's great nation; Jesus answered that culture-bound, political hope in a totally unexpected way, sending them out as his royal ambassadors to announce him as the new worldwide King.

Whatever your natural desires is or are pray; Our Father in heaven, hallow be your name. Your kingdom come your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Gives us this our daily bread….then pause for a moment, and name that desire before the Lord, and pause again and then move right along with the rest of the prayer.

The Kingdom-prayer isn't a prayer, such as some religions would advocate, for our desires to be taken away or annihilated. In bringing them into the prayer within the setting of the earlier petitions for God's honor, his kingdom and his will, it asks for our desires to be satisfied in God's way and God's time. And, since God himself is most truly the deepest object of our hunger, this clause asks that we may be fed with God himself.

2. Looking Beyond our Needs

Second, however, we must of course lift our eyes beyond our own needs. It is impossible to pray our daily bread, without being horribly aware of the millions who didn't have bread yesterday, don't have any today, and in human terms are unlikely to have any tomorrow either. But what we do about his, as we pray this prayer in church and then have our potluck lunch today?

On a fundraising dinner last month Val and I sat next and chatted with a lady who heads up the Methodist Social Welfare Ministry. She tells me that it is her longing and prayer to engage the English Speaking Churches to assist them in their programs in feeding the poor in Hong Kong. Some English Speaking Churches in HK did come to help. So, I asked her what that experience was like. She paused for a moment and said; Well, they did good. I kept pushing her, come on you can tell me the real story. She then said, I was surprise at the reaction of those that came to help from the English Speaking Churches, their main concern was to preach the salvation message and to see people come to know Jesus.
For me that's a very sad and unwise reaction. Here you have hungry people, and we spiritualize their needs. What these beloveds need is the love of Jesus. As a Church, our role is to partner with organizations like the Methodist Social Ministry and others. The key is partnership. We come in their with servant hearts, not because we have all the answers, but because we are motivated by the love of God, and our love for His Kingdom to come on earth and will be through ministries and mission organizations that are serving our communities day-in-day-out.

Praying for those in need is one thing, but praying alongside the hungry, the poor and those desperate from whatever deep need. That's Biblical Missions right there. We are called to pray for and with those in need. We should see ourselves, as we pray the Lord's Prayer, as part of the wider Christian family, and human family, standing alongside the hungry, and praying, in that sense, on their behalf.

When we go to the Special Needs with Shanti, (Dec, 13), the Ling Oi Drug Rehab, (Dec, 20), the Prison; (Dec, 25), and the Home for the Elderly (TBC), or serving at Barnabas Home, with Kenneth and others, we are in the sense standing on behalf of people in need, praying Father, may your kingdom come to these beloved of yours, and may their daily needs be met by You, and by the gifts you have blessed me with.

3. The Lord's Supper

Third and last, all these aspects of prayer come together most obviously when we meet around the Lord's Table, when by the power of the Spirit bread and wine become the vehicles and vessels of God's own love in Jesus Christ. The Eucharist is, in a sense, both the highest form of prayer, and the first and most basic answer to our prayer. It forms a lens through which all the other answers come into focus.

The Eucharist is, first, the way in which Jesus himself taught us to remember him, to think of him. If the Lord's Prayer is the prayer which summed up his own life and work, enabling his followers to breathe in his life and love and make it their own, the Eucharist is the symbol which did the same thing, pointing particularly to his dying and rising.

As we do this in remembrance of Him, we are taken back in heart and mind, and in sacramental time and place, to the very life of Jesus himself, as He feasted with his friends, as He celebrated one last kingdom-party. This is the Kingdom-banquet, and we are the honored guests. That, as we saw, is where this clause in the prayer began.

But the Eucharist is also the place above all where we can come with our own physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual needs, and lay them before the God to whom all desires are known.

The drama of what we do here, coming with empty hands to receive bread - God's bread, the bread of life, the bread of tomorrow which is Jesus Christ himself - this drama draws together in a deep and rich symbol the whole action by which we bring our muddled and jumbled selves into the light and love of God.
We can bring whatever is on our minds and hearts to God in this action, without fear or shame, be our concerns never so agonizing or never so trivial, trusting that, along with the physical bread, the God we call 'Father' will give us all that we need, not least healing, forgiveness, support, and courage, in every other department of our lives.

**Conclusion**

Throughout this week, with the Table of our Lord or the Eucharist in mind, I want you to daily bring with you, in mind and heart, your needs and someone you know, or know of, or have seen on television, who desperately needs God’s “bread,” literally or metaphorically.

Once you pray for yourself, and that love one, now pray for the needs of our city of Hong Kong, China and through out our world.

Christmas is all about remembering the King, ushering in His Kingdom, and calling us to play our roles in ushering in his Kingdom, first through prayer. Pray therefore, the Lord's in honoring the Father’s name, seeking for His Kingdom to come on earth, and pray for our needs and needs of the world.

Prayer then as our Lord Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life, taught us to pray;

> Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.
> Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
> **Give us this day our daily bread,**
> and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
> And lead us not into temptation,
> but deliver us from evil.
> For thy is the Kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever, Amen!