

“The Bread of Life in Our Backyard”
Luke 11:1-13

Colonel Sanders of Kentucky Fried Chicken arranges to visit the Pope. After receiving the papal blessing he whispers, "Your Eminence, do we have a deal for you. If you change The Lord's Prayer from 'give us this day our daily bread....' to 'give us this day our daily chicken....' we will donate \$500 million dollars to the church". The Pope responds saying, "That is impossible. The Prayer is the Word of the Lord and it must not be changed". "Well then," says Colonel Sanders, "we are prepared to donate \$1 billion to the Church if you change the Lord's Prayer from 'give us this day our daily bread....' to 'give us this day our daily chicken....'" Again the Pope replies "That is impossible. The Prayer is the Word of the Lord and it must not be changed". Finally, Colonel Sanders says to the Pope, "Sir, this is our last offer. We will donate \$5 billion to the church if you change the Lord's Prayer from 'give us this day our daily bread....' to 'give us this day our daily chicken....'" and he leaves. The next day the Pope meets with the College of Cardinals. "I have good news, and I have bad news," he tells them. "The good news is that the Church has come into \$5 billion ... The bad news is that we're losing the Wonderbread account."

Money talks! So when we pray for our daily bread we are often bombarded by all the other things we must have. The list of our basic necessities has expanded dramatically over the years. Many things that used to be considered luxuries are now seen as essentials for our daily life, such as cell phones, computers, travel, toys, pre-packaged foods, and so on. We have blurred the line between our needs and wants. This of course didn't happen overnight. In the 1920's there was a strong current in our country to get us to focus on becoming consumers. In a 1925 book called, "*The Man Nobody Knows*" Bruce Barton presented an image of Jesus to fit the 20th century. This was a Jesus who was "the founder of modern business" because he picked up twelve men from the bottom ranks of business and forged them into an organization that conquered the world." Barton's book was a justification and a reassurance for Americans that a focus on prosperity was something to be celebrated and encouraged because Jesus did it. Barton was in the advertizing business. According to Richard Fried in his 2002 introduction to Barton's book, "As the U.S. economy shifted toward high mass consumption, a people once schooled that 'a penny saved is a penny earned' had to be reeducated to buy and keep buying; instructed to defer gratification, Americans now learned to enjoy and live for the moment. Programmed obsolescence required that they buy not a single car meant to last a lifetime, as Henry Ford originally intended, but a series of new ones, each boasting the latest style... The advertising profession emerged to educate the consumer in wants by redefining what was a need."

The economic problem we face today is at least 100 years in the making! Old habits die hard! One example is the fact that in the "developed" world 25% of the world's population collectively consume 85% of the world's resources. So, can we turn back the clock to living simpler lives? Maybe some people can, but most of us would struggle to do that. I believe that one essential way is to get serious about our prayer life. Our Bible story for today tells us about Jesus teaching the disciples how to pray. This is the shortened version of the Lord's Prayer which we all learn as Christians at an early age. It is a prayer about the daily realities of our life and faith. Yet, I think that we tend to look at this prayer as a format or as something strictly spiritual in our lives. Today I would like to focus on the petition for our daily bread. Why ask for bread? Bread is the basic expression for people's need for survival. Without having our basic bread, we can't make it. Israel believed God to be the one who provides their daily bread. Key to Israel's understanding of God as the provider of bread is the fact that God provides bread to the poor, hungry, widows, orphans, and foreigners (Ps 146:7; Deut 10:18). The notion that all should have bread to eat is also at the heart of the manna story as people left slavery in Egypt (Exod 16:18).

The concept of praying for daily bread is difficult for most of us to relate to in many ways. We are so removed in many ways from this basic petition in the Lord's Prayer. According to Norman Wirzba, professor and chair of philosophy at Georgetown College in Georgetown, KY, "most people in the United States and throughout Western culture are virtually estranged from their food, with profound

consequences for their physical, communal and spiritual health.” Yet, every time we pray the Lord’s Prayer, it is a reminder for us about the importance of sharing bread with others. It is reminder about our dependence on God to open our hearts and to transform us. It is a prayer that can help us focus on the basics of life. The prayer does not say, “Give us today our ice cream,” because this is a prayer for our basic needs and not the extras. Our petition to pray for daily bread is about allowing us to be shaped and transformed again to see the value of having the basics being provided for all and that life is much more than consumption. Certainly the promise of happiness didn’t materialize with all of our focus on material possessions. In fact, our need for consumption is literally killing us. Recently, the American Psychological Association released the findings of a survey they conducted of 7,000 American households. The study noted that eighty percent of Americans were stressed about the economy and their personal finances. Half were worried about their ability to provide for their family’s basic needs. 56% were concerned about their own job stability. 60% of respondents reported feeling angry and irritable, and 52% reported laying awake at night worried about this. The report concluded that, “The declining state of the nation’s economy is taking a physical and emotional toll on people nationwide.”

So we pray today for our daily bread and remember the power of focusing on the basics as something that God shapes in our lives. Another element of the Lord’s Prayer in Luke is the fact that it is followed by the story about the persistent friend. Jesus’ disciples ask him to teach them to pray. The "Lord's Prayer" is only the beginning of his response to that request in Luke's gospel. After the prayer, Jesus tells a story of a most ungenerous so-called "friend." The man is blessed with the means to fulfill his community's obligation (a shared obligation) to feed a traveler in need. How is such a blessed man called to pray? With words, certainly, but also with actions. How could he ask God to "give us each day our daily bread," and then fail to give that bread to one of those for whom he has asked God to provide? The man tells his friend no. How is the man's friend called to pray? If he has prayed for the coming of God's kingdom and the messianic banquet, how can he leave one friend without bread when he has it? The friend keeps banging on the door. Luke calls it "shamelessness" in verse 8 which is a more accurate translation of *anadeia* than “persistence.” The shouting friend is in effect conducting a public protest threatening to expose the richer man's lack of hospitality, and it works. The shameless protest is a prayer as well as an answer to prayer; through it each has daily bread.

A key element to our prayer for daily bread is persistence or shamelessness. It is about asking God to shape our lives and challenging our communities to respond to the needs of people in our communities. The story of the “shameless” man asking for bread is a great testimony to what prayer is. It is about being persistent, shameless, putting our pride aside and being open about our needs before God. This is not to say that God needs my words before God agrees to help me. But prayer is about us needing God’s redeeming power in our lives. The act of being open about our needs before God is very important because our pride and pretenses cannot stand unchecked. When we are open about our needs, then we are also open to the needs of others as they relate to their daily bread. Sometimes, it is easier to not think or not know about the needs. I am thankful that you, the people of this congregation, are very aware of the needs of our community. You are also very generous in responding to God’s call to share the bread of life in our own backyard. I am thankful that many of you here quietly serve others in your daily life in a variety of ways: through your professions, your service on community boards, city council, voting for new programs, helping someone in need, and other community service ways. There is a list in your bulletin of the many ways this congregation has responded to the needs in our local area. One of these examples is our support for Crossroads house. Today we have Glen Adams who will share with us how he sees this prayer for daily bread enacted through Crossroads.

Glen sharing

Roula: May the Lord’s Prayer inspire us to bring our needs before God and to be open to the needs of those who don’t have their daily bread. Amen