

## **THE MESSAGE for January 2, 2011**

**Matthew 6:5-15**

*Living on a Prayer*

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Living on a prayer brings a new beginning. We all need a new beginning from time to time, don't we? Penn State could have used a new beginning yesterday. Every day is a new beginning. Every year is a new beginning. Our faith in Christ Jesus is all about new beginnings – from a personal failing, or a tragic experience, or a desire to pursue a dream that didn't go as we had expected. We share a need and a hope for a new beginning as we move into a New Year. Good-bye 2010. Hellooooo 2011!

Check out this video titled “New Years Inspiration.” May it inspire us towards the hope of a fresh start. (Show video, “New Years Inspiration.”)

A new year. A new beginning. A new start. As we begin a new year we also begin a new worship series based on the Lord's Prayer and the petition “Give us this day our daily bread.”

Bread is nothing new. It is very basic to human life – like air or water, unless, of course, you're on a low carb diet. People began making a type of flat bread from flour and water cooking it on a hot stone around 10,000 BC. The ancient Egyptians are given credit for inventing the oven and discovering yeast to leaven the bread around 3,000 BC. We humans are always looking for a way to improve the art of bread-making. In our house we have this bread maker where you dump in all the ingredients, plug it in, push a button and it will mix and bake the bread for you. And I'm not talking about Amber, my wife.

In 1890, women baking at home produced more than 80% of the bread eaten in the United States. Nearly 40 years later in the late 1920s, 94% of the bread eaten in the United States was baked by men in commercial bakeries. The average American today eats almost 60 pounds of bread a year. That's more than one of these a week. (*Hold up the one pound loaf of bread from the children's message*).

You've probably heard the phrase “that's the best thing since sliced bread.” Do you know who invented the first bread slicer? His name was Otto Frederick Rohwedder. He made the first bread slicer in 1912. His idea of doing things in a new way was met with great resistance from the bakers, who complained that sliced bread would quickly go stale. So by 1928, Rohwedder designed a bread slicer that would also wrap the bread.

“Give us this day our daily bread.” Right in the middle of the Lord's Prayer Jesus teaches us about the most basic stuff of life, “bread.” And when we pray, “Give us this day our daily bread,” we are praying a mouthful that goes far beyond just filling our bellies with food.

First – these words takes us back to the ancient past. Second – they say something about the present. And third – they point us to look forward with hope-filled eyes to the future. God is the one who provides for our daily bread in all of its form.

The past – this petition take us back to the exodus story. You recall God’s people are wandering through the wilderness on their way to the land flowing with milk and honey. On their way they get hungry. Who doesn’t get hungry when traveling? When we travel, even if it’s just across town, it doesn’t take long for someone in the vehicle to ask “do we have any snacks?” So in their wilderness wandering the people cry out, “do we have any snacks?” Actually they said something like this, “Why did God drag us out of Egypt just to starve us to death out here in the wilderness?” It helps if you say this in a whining voice.

So God answered their cries and sent them bread from heaven, manna, a white flaky substance, covering the ground each morning. God informed the people to gather enough manna to make bread for one day and one day only. But some of the people gathered more than they needed. They were greedy. They wanted to make sure they had enough for tomorrow just in case God didn’t come through tomorrow. But they should have listened to God because the leftovers rot – go bad – spoil. God doesn’t like leftovers.

When we pray “give us this day our daily bread,” we’re not only asking that God would provide what we need for today, we’re asking that God would help us live one day at a time, trusting in God’s daily provisions. God provides. Say that with me with joy in your heart, *God provides*.

That’s what Jesus teaches when he said, “Seek first his Kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matthew 6:32-34). How true.

Second – this petition takes us from past to the present – to the here and now.

When we pray “give us this day our daily bread” what are we really asking? It probably depends upon our situation and our circumstance. For many of us, physical bread is not our main focus. We have more than enough, and for that we are truly thankful for a gracious and generous God. So if our “daily bread” isn’t physical bread what do we need to sustain us for today – courage, strength, love, guidance, peace, patience? Who could use more patience? We need these spiritual bread items too, don’t we?

Our daily bread is both physical and spiritual.

I’ve been praying the Lord’s Prayer for as long as I can remember. And I enjoy teaching it to my children. I’ve noticed something. This prayer is not just about “me” and “mine,” it’s about “us” and “our.” Have you noticed that?

In this month's church newsletter – "The Transformer" – on page 9 there is an article that points out the fact that we are missing some pronouns in the Lord's Prayer. The article reads...

*You cannot pray the Lord's Prayer and even once say, I.  
 You cannot pray the Lord's Prayer and even once say, My.  
 Nor can you pray the Lord's Prayer and not pray for one another.  
 To ask God for "our" daily bread you must include your [sister or] brother.  
 For others are included... in each and every plea,  
 From the beginning to the end of it, it does not once say, Me.*

Jesus teaches about community in this prayer – about our care for one-another – about the global community of humanity. When we pray "give us this day our daily bread," we aren't just praying that we will be fed, but that all people will be fed. And that God will guide us to do our part in making that happen. And that's quite a request, because according to the United Nations, 850 million people in the world will go to bed hungry tonight and every night, including more than one million being children right here in the USA.

This petition, "give us this day our daily bread," takes us back to Exodus, it also says something powerful about the here and now, and it points us with hope towards tomorrow.

The Greek word, *epiousios*, translated as "daily," is an interesting word. The only place that word is used in the Bible is in the Lord's Prayer. It appears nowhere else in any Greek literature. Nowhere. Some scholars wonder if perhaps Jesus, or the Gospel writers, made up this word. The word "daily" may not even be the best translation. It could also be translated, "give us the bread of the coming day."

The Bible talks about God's vision for the future as a great banquet in which there is abundance for everyone. This petition reveals a "foretaste of the feast to come." For now, we have a nibble, an appetizer, to keep our faith alive, to whet our appetites for the feast God is planning and preparing for our future.

Imagine I invited you over to our house for a dinner party. You arrive at 6:00, and assume we'll be eating by seven. But what if 7:00 rolls around and there's no food on the table. Seven-thirty comes and goes, 8:00 comes and goes, still no food. 9:00 comes, 10:00 comes and the table still isn't set. You might give up hope of ever getting fed, right?

But what if at 7:00 we brought out a tray of appetizers, then again at 7:30 and then at eight, and maybe even again at nine. That may help sustain your hopes of a full sit-down meal. All the while wondering what food stuff might come out of the kitchen next. At least, I'm hoping you would.

So too it is with God's banquet meal. We know the promise God makes to us. We are people of God's promise. God provides. That's because God is good. *All the time.* And all the time. *God is good.*

We know that God is good and that God's promises are trust worthy and true. In the same way, we trust in God's promises that one day God's Kingdom will come and God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven. This is the promise we hear about in Revelation 21:

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, 'Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.' And the one sitting on the throne said, 'Look, I am making everything new!'"

That's God's promise to us offering us hope for living today – knowing that there is more to come. We see and experience plenty of pain and sorrow and crying and things that are not right in this world. God sustains us with glimpses of the promise, nibbles of the feast that is to come. God sustains our faith with things like:

A beautiful sunrise after a difficult night.

The embrace of a loved one when our heart has been broken.

Music or some other art that moves us to tears of joy just when we thought our hearts were too hard to weep.

The smile of a stranger, just when we thought no one cared.

The bread and the wine of communion, just when we thought we were beyond God's forgiveness and redemption.

When we pray "give us this day our daily bread" it reminds us that God provides, and will continue to provide for our physically and spiritually hungers. God feeds us. God blesses us daily to be a blessing to others. I pray that you will go from this time of worship and be a blessing to everyone you meet today. And that you will see them as God's blessing to you.

But before you go, come to the table of God's grace. Come and take a little nourishment for your journey. Come and receive a foretaste of the promised feast that is coming. Allow this appetizer of bread and wine to whet your appetite and strengthen your faith. As we begin a new year we know that God will provide. We know there is more to come. Amen.