**June 17, 2018**

**Luke 11:2-4**

*Daily Bread*

The headlines this week were dominated by heart-breaking pictures of families on the United States’ southern border. People who should be counted as refugees, fleeing violence and poverty and inadequate healthcare. People who are desperate for the chance to give their children something better. They spend days and weeks traveling on foot, hot and thirsty and tired, without any luggage or belongings to speak of. They arrive in our country with empty hands – in need of food and water, certainly, and ready to get to work. They want to earn money to feed and clothe their children. They want to earn money to send home to help others who need better food and shelter and healthcare.

These women and children arrive here in need of their daily bread. And even with the threat of internment, they continue to pour over our border.

We have an innate tendency to separate ourselves from refugees and immigrants, creating us/them constructs in language and policy and practice, saying *we* have certain right because we are here and we know and we have some sort of privilege. We talk as if *they* are other-than.

In scripture, there is no question that God is on the side of the alien and stranger and refugee. Moses was instructed, “When a stranger travels through your land, you shall do no wrong against him. You shall treat the stranger as a native, as you would treat yourself, for you were once strangers in the land of Egypt.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Then Jesus told the disciples the difference between good and bad people was that righteous people fed the hungry, and gave water to the thirsty, and clothed the naked, and cared for the stranger. For “whenever you do it to the least of these, you do it to me.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

In scripture, there is no question that God holds us responsible for caring for one another – friend and neighbor, as well as stranger and alien. The Lord’s Prayer gives further voice that there is no other-than among us. We humans are all one, regardless of country or language or income or religion. There is no better than. There are no privileges given to one over another. God is the one who is other-than. So when we pray, we are praying as one human family to “our” Father. There is no us and them. We are one “us” under God.

The implication is then that when we pray for “our daily bread,” we are asking God for the world’s daily bread. We are asking for our individual families, and for Sweet Hollow, and for Christians, and for Long Islanders, and for Muslims and Latino and Middle Eastern and North Korean daily bread. This prayer transcends any borders or divisions we see in the world. This prayer sustains creation, just as it acknowledges the Holy One who creates and provides and sustains us all.

Judgment occasionally creeps into this prayer when those who have easy access to daily bread consider those who do not have daily bread. Questions are asked – are they working hard enough? is their family helping? do they belong here? should they take their need of daily bread to another community? Yet we know that (in God’s ears) there is nothing undignified about asking for daily bread; this is what Christ commanded us to pray. There is nothing pitiful or undignified about those who truly need daily bread; these are the people whom Jesus loved and served. We are all reliant upon God to feed us each day. Without God’s gifts of sun and rain, plants and animals, we could not survive. Without other gifts of shelter and employment and community, we could not survive. So when we pray “give us this day our daily bread,” we who don’t worry too much about our daily bread must pray with thanksgiving for God’s provisions received.

While we give thanks for the bread that God gives us, we also petition God for those who do not have the same provisions. We pray for those who are hungry today. We pray for those who don’t have easy access to daily bread. In our country alone, more than 10% of people are food insecure, without access to regular and nutritious food. Children and senior citizens are most at risk for hunger, and most reliant upon food ministries to feed them each week. And of course refugees, immigrants, people in wartime rations, prisoners, and others who are similarly dependent upon an external system – whether governmental or social agency. There are many, many people in the world who know the physical feeling of hunger. They are too familiar with the search for daily bread. And they have something to teach us.

The Israelites who wandered in the desert for 40 years were given manna to eat each day. They could not store it for tomorrow’s meals; it would spoil. So for 40 years, they got up each morning to gather exactly what they needed for that day. For 40 years, they ate the same thing. Every day. They complained. They moaned. But God still provided. It wasn’t fancy. It wasn’t what they wanted, but God provided.

Most of us at Sweet Hollow are given daily bread in such abundance that we have pantries full of tomorrow’s meals. Many of us take our daily bread for granted, perhaps even thinking that we have provided for ourselves. In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus reminds us that God alone is the giver of life. God alone is the sustainer of our days. And God does not give to us alone, but to all God’s children. God gives bread for the world.

Several years ago, two Lutheran scholars wrote an entire article [[3]](#footnote-3) wondering if Christians in the United States should fast from saying this line in the Lord’s Prayer. Because we, as a whole, don’t depend upon God to provide our daily bread, but put stock in our own endeavors. Because we, as a country, are affluent and often act entitled to more than our “daily” bread from the world’s share. These scholars argued that perhaps we Americans should not say this phrase in the Lord’s Prayer, but instead, pray it silently, and listen to the voices of the world’s poor. They argued that if we were quiet and intentionally reflective, we would be reduced to faithful penitence followed by political action. We would grow awareness of our daily bread, and confess our lack of attention to the world’s hungry. But this fast would soften our hearts to realize that it is not enough for us to simply pray and repent. It is not enough for us to say thank you for our abundance, or feel sad that others don’t have as much. If praying the Lord’s Prayer will change us, then we will be moved to not just change our heart, but also change the broken systems that shape the world.

After we pray “give us this day our daily bread,” we should also pray this with our lives. We are not prayer slacktivists, but prayer activists. So we feed hungry people. We can’t pass the opportunity to volunteer at Project HOPE. We should contact our politicians to ensure that legislation is being upheld or changed to ensure that all hungry people have access to daily bread. Whether American or refugee. Whether of sound mind or diagnosed with mental illness. Whether working 40 hours a week or staying at home, a middle aged breadwinner or a senior citizen on a fixed income. We should be working for everyone to have their daily bread. Daily bread is not ours to hoard, but ours to share.

Saint Basil the Great wrote, “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.”

So part of our hunger activism is smart shopping. We don’t buy more than we need. We don’t order more than we can eat. We don’t play games with our excess, or waste unnecessarily. We don’t have food fights or engage in other mindless activities. Our daily bread is a sacred gift. Someone needs it today, even if we don’t.

This spring we supported a newly arrived Afghani refugee family – a father and his two teenage sons. They arrived late at night to JFK airport, where an official welcome party collected them and dropped them in an empty apartment. They had a few suitcases. They were given some American money to purchase food. But at midnight in a strange country, how do you begin? The next day they received a delivery of furniture and home goods that Sweet Hollow and a few other Presbyterians collected. Someone sent a rotisserie chicken. Someone sent a new dish pack. We gave them daily bread. Weeks have passed now. They are no longer the newest Americans on the block. The father, Bashir, was actually featured in a story this weekend by WNYC. He is working for EatOffBeat, a catering company that hires new refugees. Their job is simply to make the good food they ate at home. Bashir is now earning his daily bread making bread (and other Afghani foods) for hungry New Yorkers.

The miracle of daily bread is an ordinary one. When we are hungry, we eat. When we have need, we search and work. Let us be reminded, above all, that our daily bread is a beautiful blessing. When we break bread at home, when we pass the basket to family and friends, when we witness people eating and loving and sharing, we glimpse heaven on our doorstep. The miracle of sharing was not new to the world in Jesus’ time, yet he transformed our understanding of sharing when he fed 5000 with a few fish. The miracle of hospitality was not new, yet he invited the world to feast at his table. The baking of bread and pouring of wine was a timeless act, yet he continues to transform our daily ordinary bread each time we gather around the Communion Table.

Later in Luke’s gospel, after Christ’s Resurrection, the disciples did not recognize Jesus for who he was. But after Jesus gave the disciples daily bread, then their eyes were opened. May we, too, come to know God as we receive God’s simple daily gifts. May we give thanks for what we are given, and may we work to ensure that others, too, have access to sustainable, sacred daily bread. Amen.

1. Leviticus 19:33-34 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Matthew 25:30-45 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Kitahata, S. and Nessan, C. “Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread,” *Currents in Theology & Mission*. February 2011. 38:1, pp. 48-52. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)