

Our Daily Bread

“...give us this day our daily bread...” (Matthew 6:11)

Jesus of Nazareth, carpenter and rabbi, was part of a prophetic tradition. His life, preaching, and ministry were grounded in the Biblical vision of *shalom* (peace, justice, and wholeness) proclaimed in the Hebrew Scriptures. And his approach to human relationships, both individual and institutional, was shaped by this vision.

Texts such as Leviticus 19:13 (“Do not oppress your neighbor and do not rob him. Do not keep the wages of the worker with you until the morning”) and Deuteronomy 24:14 (“Do not oppress the hired laborer, who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your people or one of the sojourners in your land within your gates”) would have been very familiar to Jesus as he preached and taught about the coming reign of God.

Little wonder then, that when Jesus taught his disciples how to pray, one of the petitions put before God was “give us this day our daily bread.” For in the Biblical vision of *shalom* assumed and proclaimed by Jesus, “bread” is more than food: it is both the meeting of basic human needs and the affirmation of the human labor that produces all that is needed for human beings to survive and thrive.

It is for this reason that the Lord’s Prayer so closely identifies “our daily bread” with the reign of God (“thy Kingdom come”), the year of the Jubilee (“forgive us our debts”), and the ultimate purpose of human existence: the glorification of God (“thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever”). “Bread” – meeting human needs and affirming the human labor that produces it – is necessary for full participation in the world desired by God because it is indispensable to the abundant life to which all people are called by God.

For this reason, Christians have rightly linked in Christian worship the Lord’s Prayer and the Lord’s Table: The bread we ask for in the Lord’s Prayer is the same bread we bless and receive at the Lord’s Table. And because this bread is the “work of human hands,” the labor that produces this bread is deeply and permanently taken into the very heart of that which is remembered and celebrated and appropriated in the memorial and eschatological meal: the transforming power of the death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

In our coming together at the Lord’s Table, “our daily bread” becomes for us the “bread of life”: Broken people from divided communities are sacramentally brought together, transformed into the one Body of Christ, and empowered to bring “wholeness to a fragmented world” [Mission Statement of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)]. In the process, Christians even now participate in the *reality of shalom* and thereby experience the truth that the essence of authentic human existence is solidarity with other human beings.

“Give us this day our daily bread,” therefore, is much more than a prayer that asks God for food. It is a plea for justice grounded in the Biblical vision of *shalom*. It is the public proclamation, through word and sacrament, that true faith in God requires the satisfaction of life’s basic needs for all God’s children. And, through its association with the body of Christ at the Lord’s Table, it is both the recognition of the sanctification of human labor and the affirmation that solidarity is essential to the transforming power of authentic Christian community.

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