

9th Sunday after Pentecost
Prayer Jesus Taught Us
July 10, 2016
Proverbs 9:1-6; Psalm 145:13-17; Luke 11:1-4

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Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace to you and peace from God our Creator, from our Savior Jesus Christ and from the life-giving, in-dwelling Holy Spirit. AMEN

Last week I asked us to envision together how God's reign of justice and peace might look, so that in creating that vision, we might live more fully into it.

This week, I stand here full of white guilt, feeling inadequate in the extreme to address the pain and frustration many of us are experiencing as a result of the deaths of two more black men at the hands of the police. I am especially aware that our pain and frustration are nothing compared to those who grieve and those who share the skin color of the deceased.

To make a grim reality worse, this time, our shock and pain are not induced by some racist cop in a city far, far away where racism is a state-wide legacy. This time, it's right here, where we have kept our racism very carefully hidden under the guise of a "Minnesota Nice" that has been offered begrudgingly and sparingly to those who aren't clearly of Scandinavian - or at least European - descent.

To sit here, comfortably, enjoying the fun music of Genus Poa, with our mantle of entitled security wrapped around us and to pray, "Give us each day our daily bread...", while our sisters and brothers are daily, systematically, historically deprived of a basic sense of their own well-being, feels greedy in the extreme.

To send our youth off on a camping trip where their greatest danger may be a sunburn and to ask God's safety upon their way, while our sisters and brothers can't drive from home to the grocery store without worrying that they'll make it home alive, feels embarrassingly trite.

To offer up our Candy Land version of Walking the Jesus Way amidst the frivolity of the Hamel Days Parade, when our sisters and brothers are right now walking through the valley of the shadow of death, feels down-right cruel.

As a called and ordained minister of the Church of Christ, I cannot allow the Gospel to become an instrument of greed, or trite or frivolous, and most certainly not cruel.

So today, I ask us to look at *how* Jesus taught us to pray this prayer:

Please take the ELW out from the chair in front of you and open to the back, page 1163, where you will find Martin Luther's Small Catechism commentary on the Prayer Jesus Taught Us.

...

First, let's notice that the very first word in the prayer is "Our". This is a communal prayer: we do not share this prayer for personal benefit or blessing, but for the well-being of the whole, for the welfare of all God's children. For the second word is "Abba", or to be more inclusive, "Father/Mother", reminding us as we address God that we do so as one of God's multitude of beloved children; we are all indeed children of the same Parent.

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The first three petitions focus on God's identity and action: "Hallowed be *your* name. *Your* reign come. *Your* will be done..."

Ezekiel 36:23ff clarifies that God's "name" or identity is made holy and made known in the world as God gathers people together; showers forgiveness upon people and cleanses them from brokenness and division; removes from them the heart of stone, replacing it with a heart of flesh; gives them a new spirit, eager to live by God's will of right relationship; and provides an abundance of food, so that none live in what God refers to as the "disgrace" of famine. The entirety of the Prayer Jesus Taught Us is summed up in these verses from Ezekiel - all of it pointing to God's name being made holy.

Conversely, when we live in such a way that division triumphs over unity, where forgiveness is rationed by hearts of stone, where we live for our own desires and wants so that some are living in the disgrace of famine - whether of food, safety, social or political regard, governmental concern, or general well-being - then we are living in a way that desecrates God's name.

Rather, as we pray those first three petitions, we are asking that God's name be made holy - among us here; that God's reign come - among us here; that God's will be done - among us here. All of this is to acknowledge that we live in a world where evil is real, where evil infects us body, mind and soul, where evil rules our thoughts through deception and falsehood, where evil rips apart community and pits individual interests against the good of the whole. To pray that God's reign will come is to ask that God's justice and peace will prevail over forces of hatred, fear and destruction. To ask that God's will be done is to pray that all humanity would live in right relationship with one another and with God.

Which brings us to the Fourth Petition, our focus for today. Move down the page a bit...

We shift here, to requests made directly for "us," beginning with "Give us this day our daily bread."

"Us" is significant. Again, notice that we pray not just for "me", but for "us". We pray that God would provide not just what "I" need, but what we *all* need, what *we* need collectively.

And what is it that we need?

Martin Luther's definition is at the top of the next page:

'What then does "daily bread" mean?

Everything included in the necessities and nourishment for our bodies, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, farm, fields, livestock, money, property, an upright spouse, upright children, upright members of the household, upright and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, decency, honor, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like.'

In this Prayer Jesus Taught Us, in this Fourth Petition, we ask God to provide for us - *and for our sisters and brothers* - the *basics* of life, which include not only food, drink, clothing, shoes and shelter, but "upright and faithful rulers, good government... peace, health, decency, honor... and faithful neighbors."

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In this Prayer Jesus Taught Us, in this Fourth Petition, we ask God to provide for us - *and for our sisters and brothers* - the very things that are being denied nearly every person of color in American society: political leadership that looks out for their best interest, their safety and security, their stability and basic physical needs; local governments that “serve and protect”, rather than foster racism and persist in racially motivated acts of violence; peace from the unrest hoisted upon them over centuries and generations of slavery, hatred, fear, division, isolation, imprisonment, and mental and physical torture; the same decency and honor that you and I assume as our right every time we drive to work, shop in the grocery store, visit the doctor, or bring our kids to school; and faithful neighbors - which is us.

We, who sit in these pews week after week, we are the faithful neighbors we pray God will provide our sisters and brothers. As such, we are called to Wisdom’s table, where we are invited to, “eat of [her] bread and drink of the wine [she has] mixed”, namely, the bread of life and cup of love we share regularly in Holy Communion: the bread that promises forgiveness and the cup that offers us new life; the gifts of welcome, belonging and community.

Sustained by her bread and wine, Wisdom encourages us to, “lay aside immaturity”, that is, stop looking out for only ourselves - individually and “ourselves” as in, my family, my immediate group of friends, my social circle.

Rather, says Wisdom, we are invited to eat and drink and then live and walk in the way of insight. Filled with the life and love of Christ, we cannot sit still. We cannot watch from the sidelines. We cannot disengage from the work of God’s reign. Wisdom calls us to “walk in the way of insight”: the way that reflects our knowledge of the Holy One, the Way of Jesus, the way of forgiveness and healing, justice and peace; the way that makes God’s name holy, ushers in God’s reign and follows God’s will.

It is not enough for us to gather here to be fed, for then the Gospel indeed becomes an instrument of our greed. It is not enough for us to go home from here as though we have lived God’s will or done our Christian duty by receiving God’s good gifts, for then, indeed, the Gospel has become trite and frivolous, and even cruel.

Rather, we are invited to Wisdom’s banquet where we are filled with the life and the love of Christ, which counteracts our greed and instead, fuels our prayer for daily bread on behalf of all of us, so that all God’s children receive what they need from God’s abundance: food and drink, shelter and safety, honor and decency, justice and peace.

We are invited to the feast of victory for our God, where fear and death have no power, not to tritely ask that our young people have nothing to fear on their camping adventure, but that all God’s children, the youth of every community, would enjoy a basic sense of safety and well-being on the streets of their neighborhoods and in their schools, in their vehicles and their homes.

We are invited to Wisdom’s table, where we receive her bread and wine as fuel for our journey, for which our seemingly frivolous Candy Land-themed float is but a warm-up. For walking in Wisdom’s Way, in the Way of Jesus means marching toward justice, toward honor and decency for all, toward peace between neighbors, within communities, amongst all God’s children. Wisdom’s bread and wine are fuel for the long and winding journey from where we are today

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toward reconciliation and healing, for the journey toward real and lasting peace between peoples, the journey toward transparency and justice in our social structures and governance, the journey toward the end of hatred, fear and cruelty and the beginning of hope and joy.

God responds to our prayer, "Give us each day our daily bread..." with an invitation to Wisdom's feast: a feast that sustains us in our efforts to be faithful neighbors, a feast that nourishes us for the long walk toward reconciliation, justice and peace.

We pray, "Give us each day our daily bread..." and we are invited to Wisdom's feast: a feast where all live together in diverse unity; a feast where harmony is both sung and experienced; a feast where all are filled with the bread of life; a feast where the cup of love is poured out for you, for me, for our children and grandchildren, for our neighbors and friends, for the strangers beyond these doors, and especially today for all who grieve.

AMEN