

Manna not Mammon
Matthew 6:11
June 24, 2007

Last week I talked about us praying this prayer as a part of our daily lives. Making it our own and entering into that opportunity of the experience of the early church and of what Jesus asked of us. And I think I would continue if you missed last week to ask you do that. I think it will make this time much more meaningful and allow you to explore the depths of the prayer as well. I also mentioned that my thoughts sometimes wondered when I prayed to things like baseball and the New York Yankees and I must saw that this prayer in between has not done much good for them, letting us know that God is not always concerned about the smaller things in life that we think maybe he should be at times.

Also, you'll notice in this prayer that as we looked at last week we had a focus on God. We focused on the very being of God and God as the object of the prayer. This week we move away from that foundation which is the foundation for all that follows in the prayer to focus on us and a beginning to focus on our needs.

Give us this day our daily bread

There was one Christmas in which my mother decided that she needed a bread machine. And so for Christmas morning we got her the Rolls-Royce of bread machines. This thing was a dual bread unit, I mean it would mix the bread and all the stuff you'd put in there and do all that you needed to make bread and it would cook it in the thing itself and you simply pulled out the pan and you had bread. Well Christmas day we had all kinds of good bread and in the week's to follow we had sour dough bread and butter everywhere and bread everywhere. Then slowly but surely we didn't have as much bread. The machine was used as much and it became kind of a nuisance as it took up so much space on the counter and you couldn't make your peanut butter and jelly sandwiches like you used to. The next thing you knew the bread machine made its way into the pantry so that the door wouldn't shut all the way. So that we had more counter space and it would be brought again so it was promised to make bread at a later date. And then finally at one point the machine just disappeared altogether. My mom was

convinced that she needed a bread machine but actually it was that she wanted a bread machine.

It is in the prayer, “give us this day our daily bread” that we are asked to distinguish between wants and needs. And we are told that the most basic needs of subsistence will be provided by God but it is in many ways a metaphor as we pray for bread that we are listing and holding up before God this idea that God will meet our needs in a holistic way and our most basic needs will be provided by God. Again, what we need not what we want, because I would want a corvette. I would want a bright yellow corvette, one with swooping lines and an engine to die for. I would want one that you could shine up and see your face in it and then I could at least once a week wash and wax the vehicle and polish the chrome on it so that it consistently and constantly looked like it was on the showroom floor. What I need is transportation. That might just be a bicycle or a bus. Folks who have been to Belize come back seeing that many folks don’t have cars and the way they get around is exactly that; reminding us in stark contrast the difference between wants and needs. I want my children to achieve in life, I want them to be successful but really all I need is for them to be healthy and happy, for them to feel a sense of love and security and safety.

I want to more involved with hands-on mission. I would like to get my hands dirty more often but I also need to listen to God and maybe I am needed in this pulpit and not away from it proclaiming the word of God and maybe I am needed more behind the scenes to make sure that our mission identity and focus continues and is supported well. You see there is a vast difference between wants and needs. And Philip Yancey as he wrote on prayer reminds us of this fact when he says, “I’ve become more convinced than ever that God finds ways to communicate with those who truly seek him especially when we lower the volume on surrounding static.”

I remember reading the account of a spiritual seeker who interrupted a busy life to spend a few days in a monastery. “I hope your stay is a blessed one”, said the monk as he led the man to his cell. “If you need anything let us know and we will teach you how to live without it.”

So often we think our wants are our needs. It is in this prayer that we learn we can live without our wants and that God can meet our needs. But what if what we want is

something that we do not get? How is it that we react? Do we find ourselves as adults in diapers and a pacifier throwing a fit because we do not get what we want? Is our majesty, the infant, suddenly present as our wants go unmet? If we confuse our wants and needs what happens when we don't get what we think we need? Magazines, for me, give me a tremendous sense of the 'I wants'. Magazines, to me, are a sense of saying to them 'get behind me Satan' because I see in there all kinds of things suddenly I think I need. But really they are things that I want. And when I hear of once, I often frame it in this way, I think of things that are rather superficial and rather self-centered as I think of that word want. But in all honesty as we think about our wants they can be brought to a whole new plane with a whole new intensity in a way that impacts our very existence in a whole new way.

When I was in Harriman Jimmy had MS and was confined to a wheelchair. And you would be visibly reminded of that every Sunday as the kids came forward for the children's sermon because all the kids would gather and Jimmy would come down in the wheelchair before the congregation being pushed by his mother. She would say to me on occasion, "Max we would love for you to have a visit, Jimmy is really struggling, he's struggling with his wheelchair and with all that he's going through." Often I could sense maybe a plea to be there as much for the parents as it was for Jimmy. And if you were to ask Jimmy after having spending time with him, as you found that he struggled with God, as you found that he struggled with life, as you found that there were many struggles in his life. If you would ask Jimmy what is the one thing you want he would unequivocally say and with quite a bit of emphasis, "I want to be out of this wheelchair!"

We do not always get what we want and it's hard. What if we never get out of a wheelchair? It is the poem of a Catholic priest in one of my favorite novels of all time, Sheldon Van Akins' A Severe Mercy. It is a poem that the Catholic priest writes to Sheldon "if everything is lost thanks be to God. If I must see it go, watch it go, watch it fade away and die thanks be to God is all I have and if I have him not I have nothing at all. If all is lost thanks be to God for he is he and I, I am only I."

When we do not get what we want we are in a position only to fall on our knees and come back to God. When we do not get what we want we pray 'give us this day our daily bread' and we turn to God who provides for our needs. But notice as we pray 'give

us this day our daily bread' give us this day, there is a focus on the moment there is a focus on the now, there is a focus on a very specific point in time. Not the past and not the future.

One of the things said in auto racing, it's an old cliché that if you want to win the race at the end of 200 and something laps if you desire to win you must do one thing first and that is finish the race. It's not unlike a college student who's all concerned about her major and she's concerned, "I don't know what to major in, there are so many topics and I'm not sure what to do and I'm not sure at the end of all that the job market and even if there will be a job there or even what kind of job I should have and if I get a job if I might get transferred and where I might get transferred to the country and what it's going to be like to live there and if I'm going find friends and if I'm going to connect and have a community and I don't know exactly what my salaries going to be, if I'm going to make ends meet but you know what - the first thing you've got to do is pass that math test today.

Yes it puts our focus in the moment, in the day and when we do not get what we want and we find ourselves in confusion and we find ourselves in pain we're brought to the latter point of this chapter in which Jesus says, "Do not worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will bring worries all its own, today's trouble is enough for today." Is that the level of pain we must trust? It is when significant unmet wants happen in our lives that we are called to this prayer and are reminded of the most basic level in which God meets us.

A man describes his experience with Fibromyalgia, he describes his experience with pain and as he does so he not only gives us a window into physical pain but also emotional pain and even the pain of unmet wants. It in a way is a window into aspects of human existence.

Living with chronic pain is like being in a room where a radio is playing at too high a volume, and it can't be turned down or off. I can be very distracting and prevent me from focusing on conversations or tasks.

I can look fine, even when pain has me close to tears. Because my symptoms aren't (usually) visible, I'm nervous about what others believe about my health. When

you say, “But you look fine tome,” I wonder if that means you don’t believe I don’t feel fine.

Chronic pain is variable. I can’t predict how I am going to feel when I wake up—I can’t even be sure from minute to minute. As you can imagine, this is one of the most frustrating aspects of chronic pain.

Disability-related depression is common, and I proactively manage it. Sometimes it feels as if my life was hit by a tornado when I wasn’t looking. Sometimes I feel grief and sadness for what I can no longer do. Sometime I forget how strong I am and how much I still have to offer you, my family, friends, and the world. I’m not giving up on me, and I hope you won’t either.

When I mention my pain or chronic illness, please don’t “skip” over it and look away. We don’t have to discuss my health constantly, but I can’t ignore it all the time either. Bear with me, accept me as I am, and try to understand my situation. Please grant me the same respect and faith as I make my way down this road I didn’t choose but must travel.

Here that again, as I make my way down this road that I didn’t choose but must travel.

It is when we find ourselves in the complications and the vissitudes of life that we do find in that place of pain that we do find in that place of confusion that we do find in that place of disappointment at times that God meets our needs. Often surprising so.

Give us this day our daily bread. Bread machines find there way off the counter into cupboards and then eventually gone altogether. Corvettes find themselves on the scrap heaps and sometimes cancer does not go away. But what we need, but what we need today and every day, not what we want, but what we need as we pray this prayer what we are confirming in our petition is that what we need will always be there. Amen.