

“Prayer for the Daily Needs and Support of the Body”

Fourth Petition of the Lord’s Prayer

Sermon for Lenten Midweek March 23, 2022

Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Rifle, Colorado

Rev. Charles Westby, Pastor

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Our meditation on the Lord’s Prayer brings us to the fourth petition. Jesus teaches us to pray to our Father in heaven: “Give us this day, or today, our daily bread” (Matthew 6:11). There are three things to talk about. One is what “bread” or “daily bread” refers to. Another has to do with God’s care for us and anxiety. The third has to do with thanksgiving.

So, what does “daily bread” refer to? Believe it or not, there are actually a lot of opinions about this out there. This is because the word in Greek that is translated “daily” is an unusual word. It only occurs in this petition of the Lord’s Prayer in the Bible and in one later Christian writing, the “Didache.” It is also very rare with respect to any other ancient Greek writings that exist. It only occurs once there.

Since this word is difficult, we should take it in context. Jesus talks about bread (Matthew 6:11). So, let’s just take that as bread. He talks about asking our Father to give us the bread *today*. The bread we would normally understand as the bread we need today, is, well, bread. Jesus also goes on to talk about clothing and food in Matthew 6 just after giving the Lord’s Prayer. So, bread would seem to mean bread, in this context. So, context would seem to have something to say about what the word “daily” should mean, which is, well, daily.

For these reasons I am not convinced that daily bread is a reference to Holy Communion, if you have ever heard that, though some people may think that it sounds really Lutheran to say so. Luther doesn’t take it that way.

So, let’s just go with the Small Catechism on this, which teaches us that daily bread “includes everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body” (Martin Luther, *Small Catechism*, Explanation to the Fourth Petition (St. Louis: Concordia, 1986). That is simple and straightforward enough.

But then we see the rest of what the Small Catechism says where it spells out what support and needs of the body means. “Food and drink” are obvious. But then the Catechism says: Clothing, shoes, house, home, land, animals, money, and goods. Okay, I think we get that too, pretty easily, especially about clothing, shoes, house, and home.

If we were living in a society where the economy is dominated by agriculture, as Luther’s was, then we could also see what land and animals have to do with the support and needs of the body. Crops for food come from the land and meat, milk, cheese, and butter come from farm animals. We also get wool and leather from farm animals. Cotton is also a crop.

In that kind of a culture the devout spouse, children, and workers are also quite directly related to the support and needs of the body. We could also see what good weather has to do with it.

But then the catechism says “good government, peace.” Luther explained why daily bread includes good government and peace, when he wrote this in the Large Catechism: “Probably the greatest need of all is for us to pray for our civil authorities and government. . . . For although we have received from God an abundance of all good gifts, yet we cannot retain any of them or enjoy them in happy security unless God grants us a stable and peaceable government. For where there is strife, wrangling, and war, there our daily bread is already taken from us, or at least threatened” (Martin Luther, *Large Catechism*, ed. F. Samuel Janzow (St. Louis: Concordia,

1978), 90). The war in Ukraine is a stark reminder of this.

And then the Small Catechism expands on daily bread to include friends and neighbors. In short, daily bread includes the prayer that God would grant that our civil government and communities be just, honest, peaceful, and stable places so that commerce can flourish and so there can be production of the things we need to support this body and life. These are things that we should not only pray for generally in the fourth petition, but also specifically, as the need arises.

These things are included in daily bread because God does not ordinarily provide for our physical needs by dropping food, clothing, shelter, and money down on us from the sky. He provides these things through means, that is, through our own labor and skills, and the labor and skills of others. This is how economy and commerce are created. Good government is quite important so that economy and commerce can flourish. This is the way God made things to work with respect to the support and needs of the body. Thus, these matters are appropriately matters of concern to bring to our heavenly Father.

This brings us to the second major thing to talk about. This is God's care and concern and the issue of anxiety. What Luther wrote for us in the Small Catechism and his Large Catechism do a beautiful job of teaching us what Jesus teaches in the fourth petition, namely, that God is not just concerned about our spiritual well-being. God is also concerned about physical matters. This is also seen in the Fifth and Seventh Commandments: "You shall not murder" and "You shall not steal." God created all things physical. Psalm 104 does a beautiful job of speaking about that. God is concerned about our physical needs. Jesus tells us that our heavenly Father "knows that you need them all" (Mat. 6:32), where Jesus is referring to the needs of the body.

And then there is what Deuteronomy 8 says about God making it so that the clothing and footwear of the people of Israel did not wear out as they were wandering around in the wilderness for forty years. He provided the manna, the quail, and the water. And then Moses talks to the people of Israel who were about to enter the promised land about the abundance of food they will have, and the herds and flocks, they will get iron out of the rocks and copper out of the hills, to build tools and to sell, but also to make weapons, as they might need to defend themselves. They will prosper in commerce and build houses and so on, by God's blessing. God knows that we need all of these things, though God also talks to us about anxiety. We will talk about that in a minute.

The point here is this important one: That God is not just concerned about our spiritual relationship with Him. He is certainly concerned about that, as we are taught by Jesus in the first three petitions. But God is also concerned about our physical existence. Jesus teaches us to pray about these things, and not to be bashful with God about that.

So, now we come to anxiety. Jesus talks about anxiety in the Gospel reading from Matthew 6. Anxiety is worry, which is also closely associated with fear: fear of pain, fear of loss of control, or just fear of loss, and fear of death. Here is a place of struggle for us in relation to our physical life that is also a spiritual struggle.

Thus, Jesus teaches us to address anxiety in the fourth petition. For in teaching us to ask our heavenly Father for our daily bread, Jesus teaches us a way of dealing with anxiety and worry. This way is that God cares for us so much that He wants us to come to Him with all of our concerns, lest our hearts be consumed by worry.

So, God has moved the Apostle Paul to write: "[D]o not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your

minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:6-7 ESV). God also moved the Apostle Peter to write: “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:6 ESV). The Apostle Peter tells you two really comforting things here: that God cares for you and that God is mighty. Since anxiety is also a spiritual issue, praying for God to grant us the peace that the Holy Spirit brings also comes into play.

Let us not take these statements from the Apostles as demands of the law that make us feel guilty for feeling anxiety, for we all struggle with anxiety to some extent or another. But let us take these statements of the Apostles by the Spirit as invitations to throw all of our care and need on God, for he cares for us. This is what Jesus is teaching us in the fourth petition as an answer to anxiety and its associated fears.

In wrapping this up, we come to thanksgiving. The Catechism reminds us that God in His goodness gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people (Luther, *Small Catechism*, Explanation to the Fourth Petition). Jesus says that God causes the sun to rise and the rain to fall on the just and the unjust and that this displays the love, goodness, and mercy of God (Matt. 5:45–46). So Jesus teaches us in this petition to realize by faith that all these things that involve daily bread come ultimately from God’s good, gracious, and generous hand.

It is as Moses said to the people of Israel, as they were about to enter the promised land: “Beware lest you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.’ . . . [R]emember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth” (Deut. 8:17–18 ESV). Moses did command the people of Israel to remember God. But we through faith and being taught by our Savior and moved by the Spirit give God the glory and the credit with thanksgiving from a thankful and grateful heart.

So let us in Jesus and through faith cast our cares on Him, giving thanks for the good things that come from God our Father, giving Him the glory; and so then let us also pray for contentment, hope, and peace. Amen.