

“Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread”
Psalm 78
Matthew 6

May 1, 2022

Our main text for today is Psalm 78 – so I’d like us to sing/recite this together.

It’s 27 stanzas – which can get a little monotonous –
so I’d like mix things up a little bit.

The first stanza is in the first person singular –
so I’ll go ahead and sing that solo.

The rest of the Psalm is first person plural – so it’s appropriate that your voice join there!

Then I’d like for all parents to sing stanzas 2-4 –
since this is calling parents to teach these things to their children.

Then I’d like everyone to sing stanzas 5-8.

Then I’ll sing stanza 9 – the LORD’s response to Israel’s rebellion.

Then everyone sings stanzas 10-12.

Then we’ll recite stanzas 13-14.

Then I’ll sing stanza 15.

Then everyone sings stanzas 16-19.

Then we recite 20-21.

Then those who are *not parents* will sing stanza 22 – be ready for that one!!

(top of the last page!)

Then I’ll sing stanza 23 in reply.

And then we’ll all sing stanzas 24-27 together.

[and don’t worry – I’ll direct you as we go!]

Read Matthew 6

Our Larger Catechism asks:

Q. 193. *What do we pray for in the fourth petition?*

A. In the fourth petition (which is, *Give us this day our daily bread*), acknowledging that in Adam, and by our own sin, we have forfeited our right to all the outward blessings of this life, and deserve to be wholly deprived of them by God, and to have them cursed to us in the use of them; and that neither they of themselves are able to sustain us, nor we to merit, or by our own industry to procure them; but prone to desire, get, and use them unlawfully: we pray for ourselves and others, that both they and we, waiting upon the providence of God from day to day in the use of lawful means, may, of his free gift, and as to his fatherly wisdom shall seem best, enjoy a competent portion of them; and have the same continued and blessed unto us in our holy and comfortable use of them, and contentment in them; and be kept from all things that are contrary to our temporal support and comfort.

When we pray “Give us this day our daily bread,”
we acknowledge that God alone is able to provide all that we need.

This petition is rooted in Jesus’ words,
“Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness,
and all these things will be added to you.” (Mt 6:33)

What are you concerned about?

Are you concerned about your job?
Your family?
Your future?

Jesus says that if we are fixated on our own needs, then we will miss the point of our existence.
Why are we here?
What are we doing here?
My story has so many strange twists and turns.
I don’t understand what God is doing...

Tonight we’ll be looking at a story of two women –
Deborah and Jael – in Judges 4.
If you are interested in thinking about women in the church –
you’ll want to be here!

But also, if you are interested in the question of what it means to seek first the kingdom of God!
Because if we seek first his kingdom, then all that we need will be provided.

This is precisely what Psalm 78 teaches in story form.

Psalm 78 recites the history of Israel from the days of Moses through the time of David.
The opening two stanzas, verses 1-8,
emphasize the importance of teaching this story to your children.
Why do we spend so much time at Michiana Covenant teaching OT history?
Because Psalm 78 says that this story is crucial to show our children
“they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God,
but keep his commandments;
and that they should not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation,
a generation whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful to God.”

In other words,
we teach our children to be more faithful than we have been!

Each of the next 5 stanzas begins with Israel’s rebellion and then shows God’s mighty deeds:
1) Verses 9-16 starts with Ephraim’s forgetfulness –
“they forgot his works and the wonders that he had shown them.”

God divided the sea and let them pass through.
He led them with a pillar of cloud and fire.
He split rocks in the wilderness to give them water.
And yet they grumbled.

2) Verses 17-31 then report again the failure of Israel.
*Yet they sinned still more against him, rebelling against the Most High in the desert.
They tested God in their heart by demanding the food they craved.
They spoke against God, saying, "Can God spread a table in the wilderness?
He struck the rock so that water gushed out and streams overflowed.
Can he also give bread or provide meat for his people?"* (v17-19)

Hmm.
So they prayed, "give us this day our daily bread!"

When you learn to pray from Israel's history,
you discover that there is both a right way and wrong way to pray!

It's not just about saying the right words.
There is all the difference in the world between saying,
"Give me my daily bread!"
And saying,
"Give me my daily bread!"

It's about trusting the promises of God.
It's about being faithful to God's covenant.

He says that he will do what he has promised.
And he has promised to bless those who fear him, who love him, who obey him.

And the LORD heard their prayer.
And his anger burned against Israel.

And so he destroyed them, right?
No.
They deserved death for their sin and rebellion.

But the LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

*Yet he commanded the skies above and opened the doors of heaven,
and he rained down on them manna to eat and gave them the grain of heaven.
Man ate of the bread of the angels; he sent them food in abundance.* (v23-25)

In Genesis, when God opened the doors of heaven,
the waters above poured out upon the earth,

the waters of judgment deluged the earth.
But this time God opens the doors of heaven,
and he gave them the “grain of heaven” – the “bread of angels.”

But God is also just.
And while he gave them the bread of heaven,
he also “caused the east wind to blow in the heavens.”
The east wind is always a herald of bad tidings.
The east wind blows across the desert –
it is a hot, dry wind that brings destruction.

But this time it brought birds – quail they are called in Number 11 –
and the people ate their fill.

*But before they had satisfied their craving, while the food was still in their mouths,
the anger of God rose against them, and he killed the strongest of them
and laid low the young men of Israel. (30-31)*

Be careful what you pray for.
Too often we do not pray “give us this day our daily bread” –
but rather, “give me what I crave.”

God may answer your prayer.
He may give you what you crave as a means of judging you for your cravings.
Because with all cravings – with all inordinate appetites –
you can stuff yourself with all that your heart desires,
and yet it will not satisfy.
Cravings, lusts, inordinate appetites are a vacuum that cannot be filled –
a black hole that consumes light and life and yet remains dark and lifeless.

And even as God gave Israel what they asked for,
so also he may give you what you crave.
So beware of trusting “providential” signs.

But what should Israel have done with the quail?
O, that is the wrong question!
By the time the quail arrived it was too late!

The problem was not that they ate the quail!

The problem was that they craved meat.
They were not content with what God had given them.

You need to learn to discipline your cravings.
What do you crave?

What good things (food, clothing, sex, friendship)
what is it that you love too much?

You need to discipline your cravings.
The problem with these cravings is that you cannot eliminate them entirely,
because they are desires for *good* things that God has placed within us.

But you need to discipline yourself to trust God for these things,
and not to insist upon them.

So if you crave food – if you love and enjoy food for its own sake,
then you need to develop the discipline of fasting.

If you crave your daily bread,
then there may be no way for you to pray “Give us this day our daily bread”
until you abstain from your daily bread,
trusting God that *he* will provide.

If you crave sex and you are married,
then it can be awfully easy to say “hey, let’s do it whenever I want!”
But Paul even speaks about married couples abstaining (fasting from sex, you might say)
for a time in order to devote themselves to prayer.

Whose kingdom are you seeking?
Whose *will* are you doing?

These things don’t change over night.
It takes discipline.
It takes commitment.
It takes faith, hope and love.

3) The third central stanza (verses 32-39)
summarizes the wilderness generation:

In spite of all this, they still sinned.

It didn’t matter how often God disciplined them.
They didn’t get it.

Asaph summarizes their conduct in verse 37:

Their heart was not steadfast toward him; they were not faithful to his covenant.

*But he, being compassionate, atoned for their iniquity and did not destroy them;
he restrained his anger often and did not stir up all his wrath.*

He remembered that they were but flesh, a wind that passes and comes not again.

God remembers that we are flesh.
That's why he sent his son – to come in our flesh!
He became all that we are by nature –
so that we might become all that he is by grace!

- 4) Verses 40-55 then recounts all that Israel forgot.
All their rebellion – all their provocation of him in the wilderness –
all this was because they did not remember what God had done
or the day when he redeemed them from the foe.

We said earlier that Psalm 78 is a lesson to the children.

Children,
you need to know the stories of the Old Testament,
because if we don't know these stories, then we will tend to repeat them!

Verses 44-51 retell the story of the plagues of Egypt.
God warned that if his people did not obey him,
then he would send upon them the plagues of Egypt.
But in verses 52-55 we hear of the mercy of God.

*Then he led out his people like sheep and guided them in the wilderness like a flock.
He led them in safety, so that they were not afraid, but the sea overwhelmed their enemies.
And he brought them to his holy land, to the mountain which his right hand had won.
He drove out nations before them; he apportioned them for a possession
and settled the tribes of Israel in their tents.*

Would Israel learn?
Would the children learn from their fathers?

Psalm 78 is not so optimistic!

- 5) In the fifth central stanza of Psalm 78 (verses 56-66)
verse 59 says that God “utterly rejected Israel.”
Did he?
This is the point of the book of Samuel.
The point of the book of Samuel is that God has rejected Israel,
and the only way that God can redeem Israel is through a king –
a king who will succeed where Israel has failed.

And so God “forsook his dwelling at Shiloh, the tent where he dwelt among mankind,
and delivered his power to captivity, his glory to the hand of the foe.”

This is what happened in the days of Eli the priest

when the ark of the covenant was captured (1 Samuel 4).
The Philistines attacked,
and in the words of verse 64,
Their priests fell by the sword, and their widows made no lamentation.

Hophni and Phineas, the two sons of Eli, died in battle,
Eli, their father, fell over and died as soon as he heard the news,
and Phineas' wife made no lamentation,
because she died in childbirth that same day,
naming the child "Ichabod" because the glory had departed from Israel.

But it was precisely in the death of the priests, and in the capture of the ark,
that God began to move.

*Then the Lord awoke as from sleep, like a strong man shouting because of wine.
And he put his adversaries to rout; he put them to everlasting shame.*

The ark of the covenant was taken to the temple of Dagon –
the god of the Philistines.
And so in the very moment of his ultimate humiliation,
Yahweh revealed his glory!
Yahweh went alone into the temple of Dagon, the place of Dagon's power,
and Dagon fell down before the ark of the LORD.

Indeed, 1 Samuel 5 is the first turning point in the book of Samuel.

You know, of course, that your odds of success are best
when the LORD himself goes alone into battle for his people!

Lord, you know how quick we are to screw things up!
We need *you* to go before us and provide what we need!

And because God is rich in steadfast love and abundant mercy,
he continues to call weak and helpless men into his service.

*Yes, He rejected the tent of Joseph; he did not choose the tribe of Ephraim,
but he chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion, which he loves.
He built his sanctuary like the high heavens, like the earth, which he has founded forever.
He chose David his servant and took him from the sheepfolds;
from following the nursing ewes he brought him to shepherd Jacob his people,
Israel his inheritance.*

You might expect Asaph to continue with reflections on the failure of the house of David.

But the point of Psalm 78 is not one of doom and gloom.

There is hope in the end!

With upright heart he shepherded them and guided them with his skillful hand.

David was a good and faithful king – a shepherd who cared for the flock skillfully.
Salvation comes to Israel not only through God’s sovereign act,
but also through the man of God’s choosing.

Because your only hope is Jesus,
who is both the God who goes alone into the jaws of death,
and the man of God’s choosing who shepherds his chosen flock.

He is true God and true man – in one person!

And because Jesus has established his church,
therefore when you pray “give us this day our daily bread,”
you are submitting to what *God* thinks you need.
You are subduing your cravings,
disciplining your appetites,
and putting to death the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes and the pride of life
and you are asking God to provide what you need.

This is what Jesus is doing in Matthew 6, when he says:

²⁵ *“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?”*

Why are you anxious?

Why are you afraid of the future?

Jesus puts it in very simple terms.

Do not be anxious about what you will eat or what you will wear.

Our problem is that we love our *stuff*.

Our possessions *possess* us.

We are constantly trying to “get ahead.”

But Jesus says that life is about more than “stuff.”

Being “perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (5:48)
is not about “just trying harder”!

Practicing your righteousness (6:1)
is not something you do in order to “win” God’s favor.

Even so, seeking first the kingdom of God is what you do
because Jesus has first sought you and drawn you to himself!

As we keep seeing, the Sermon on the Mount is not a code of ethics –
it is the description of the life of Jesus –
and therefore the life of those who are united to him by faith.
The Sermon on the Mount is not a “law” that condemns us,
it is a gracious gift of God to and in us.

So do not be anxious.

This is the thesis that Paul sets forth.

Don't worry about what you will eat or what you will drink,
nor about your body, what you will put on.

And Jesus gives us two examples to show us *why* we should not be anxious.

First, verse 26:

²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?

Your heavenly Father feeds the birds.

*The God who made humanity after his own image
cares with great extravagance for all his creatures.*

“Are you not of more value than they?”

And yet we are anxious.

We worry.

And what does it accomplish?

Can you add an hour to your life by worrying?

(Stress and anxiety is *known* to shorten your life!)

Likewise, the second example turns to plants:

²⁸ And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

Consider the beauty of wild flowers –

such that even Solomon could not compare with their glory!

The cynical might be tempted to say –

“Wait, God feeds the birds?

What about the birds who die of starvation?

What about the plants that get destroyed?”

Jesus addresses this, too.

“God...clothes the grass of the field,
which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven.”

God’s provision for creation is lavish and abundant –
until it is time for destruction.

After all, think about God’s provision for Jesus!

God feeds and clothes his beloved Son through remarkable means –
until it is time for Jesus to go to the cross.

Even so, God will provide all that you need –
until it is time for you to bear the cross.

Jesus is talking to his disciples.

Those who believe in Jesus should not be anxious.

Those who seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness should not worry.

Your heavenly Father will provide for all those who seek him.

Notice how Jesus says this in verses 31-33:

³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

What does it mean to “seek first the kingdom of God”?

It means to pray “thy kingdom come” – certainly!

But also it means to pray “give us this day our daily bread.”

When you are seeking first the kingdom of God,

then you are not seeking your own cravings!

You are trusting God – trusting that he *will* provide those things that you need!

We want to see the kingdom of Jesus expand!

We want to see his rule – his dominion – extend more and more
in our own lives, and in all the earth!

Seek first the kingdom of God means that the priorities of King Jesus are first for us.

In other words, it means that we love Jesus – we are devoted to him –
and so we do not serve money – we serve Jesus.

Likewise, when Jesus says “seek first the kingdom of God *and his righteousness*”

his *righteousness* refers to the way that he orders his household – his kingdom.

So how do you *seek* the righteousness of the Kingdom?

By laying up treasures in heaven.

By being devoted to Jesus – not money.

By not being anxious about stuff – but being content with what God gives us.

It means that the priorities of the King become our priorities.

We give to the poor –

we pray and fast –

acknowledging that *we* are needy and helpless before God.

In the same way, seeking first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness

means that everything we have – everything we do –

is oriented towards the kingdom of God.

Jesus promises that

if you do seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,

then “all these things” will be added to you.

Food, drink, clothing.

It may be that God will provide “all these things” through your job.

Or, if you seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness

you might lose your job –

and so God might provide “all these things” through the church.

[This means that you need to be willing to *accept* help as well as *give* help!

You must be as generous in receiving mercy as you are in giving mercy!]

Of course, if you seek the kingdom of God *in order to get* all these things,

then you are not *really* seeking *first* the kingdom of God!

You cannot manipulate God into giving you what you *really* want!

When you pray “give us this day our daily bread” –

when you pray for all the things of daily life in the light of the kingdom of God –

then you are content with whatever God provides!

But verse 34 adds another *therefore* – coming back to the theme of verse 25.

³⁴ “*Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*”

Do not be anxious about tomorrow.

Jesus is not saying that you should never plan.

Obviously, you make plans.

Jesus himself made plans to go to Jerusalem!

But don’t *worry*.

The time that you spend developing a good plan is the *proper* activity for today.

The time you spend *worrying* about your plan is a waste of time!

Every anxious moment that you spend worrying about tomorrow
is a moment where you are *not* seeking first the Kingdom of God!

Each day has enough bad stuff already.

You don't need to add tomorrow's trouble to today!

So planning is fine – but worrying is a waste of time!

I can just hear you saying:

“Thanks, pastor. You just told me not to worry, but I can't help it!
I'm a compulsive worrier. How do I stop?!”

Look at Jesus.

“I know – but I'm concerned about my children.”

Look at Jesus.

“Yes, I am. But my job situation is not good...”

Look at Jesus.

If you are looking at your family, your job, your situation,
then you are not looking at Jesus!

If you are seeking first wealth and prosperity,

then Jesus does not promise that you will get everything that you *want*.

But if you are seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,

then Jesus *does* promise that you will get everything that you *need* –

“your heavenly Father knows that you need” these things.

You will get your daily bread – you will get everything that you need – until the day you die –
when you will finally get the thing that you have most longed for!

Father – give us this day our daily bread!