

PENTECOST 5 - JUNE 23, 2024
Luke 1:1-4 Our Needs

Over the past three weeks, as we have examined the Lord's prayer, we looked at: The Father, The Holiness, The Kingdom, and today our focus will be Our Needs. With the words, "Give us each day our daily bread," we are invited to turn to God in the small, urgent matters of our lives and learn to trust in God's care each morning because God already knows what we need. The prayer recognizes that we do need essentials of life day by day, but only enough, not dangerous excess.

In this petition, we confess our great dependence on the one we address as "Father", to fulfill creation's every need. We pray this petition, not in the singular of *I* or *me*, but in the plural of *us* and *our*, so that we never become people without a conscious recognition of the hungry among us, nor that we become so ingrained in physical and spiritual poverty ourselves that we never look to Jesus for bread that nurtures body, mind, and spirit.

God gives us far more than bread. Luther says the term symbolizes "everything needed in life - food and clothing, home and property, work and income, a devoted family, an orderly community, good government, favourable weather, peace and health, a good name, and true friends and neighbours." In short, "bread" encompasses all our material needs.

Theologian Jan Milic Lochman names this aspect of the prayer as "holy materialism". Jesus' initial use of "bread" refers to the staple of life made from the commonly-harvested grain. Second, his use means nourishment in general; therefore, all that we need to eat to be healthy is found in the term. And third, Jesus' term "bread" symbolizes the heavenly bread of that eternal banquet that is before us. But fourth, by its use, Jesus also meant the bread of Holy Communion.

Conversely, scholar James Kallas writes that “hunger is the word of Satan. Where Satan is, there is no bread, but where God rules, there is no hunger; there is food in abundance.” Kallas, calls our attention to the imagery in the book of Revelation. Satan is destroyed and the instantaneous outcome is the emergence of the tree that miraculously provides abundant food in all seasons. Adds Kallas, “Until ‘thy kingdom comes’ and ‘thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven’ - until then, hunger is a demonic fact. In the future, there will be bread in abundance, but now under Satan there is famine. Thus Jesus prays that the elect might receive in advance some of this forthcoming food, that they might even now have this bread of the future, to sustain them in the present evil age.”

Jesus, was born in *Bethlehem*, a name that means “*House of Bread*”. He became for us the living bread of life, and knew how hungry people were for bread. He fed thousands with a few loaves. On Maundy Thursday, he identified his betrayer by having Judas dip bread into the bowl with him, and then used bread from that same meal to institute his Holy Supper. On Easter night, after his resurrection, the Emmaus pilgrims recognized Jesus in the breaking of bread. On the shore of the Sea of Galilee, the disciples realized it was the risen Christ who had prepared breakfast of broiled fish and fresh bread for them. In remembering all these events, in our eating of bread and use of all his blessings, we become aware that God himself is present among us. God provides us with an abundance of love. It is not only a loaf that he gives, but sliced and enriched as well. That’s what we confess by “bread.”

We receive bread for food and living bread from heaven - daily. They are supplied to us by the God whose love knows no limits. He sanctifies material needs and blesses the receivers, but he still makes us a family by encouraging us to address him as “father” and insisting that we pray for “us” and “our” needs together. This prayer is so simple that children easily memorize it, yet so amply filled that its profound ideas require a lifetime of

exploring. “Give us each day our daily bread” is not an idle comment, glibly to be recited, but an important petition faithfully to be confessed. He offers us more than crumbs, but bread. Savour it. It is good to taste and marvellous to share.

The next petition, “And forgive us our sins - as we forgive those who have sinned against us” is a key theme throughout Luke. “Release” is another translation of the word for “forgiveness”. Forgiveness is release from spiritual oppression - for the forgiver as much as the forgiven. Both God’s forgiveness of us, and ours of our neighbours, figure in this petition, not because God will not forgive unless we forgive first, but because we are called to model our love on God’s. In forgiving others, we free ourselves to experience God’s forgiving love more fully, which makes it possible for us to love still more.

In the Middle East, the melting snow of Mount Hermon is the source for several streams that ultimately form the Jordan River. Despite impediments along the way, the water flows southward, forming a small lake called Huleh - now turned into farmland - and then the larger lake known as the Sea of Galilee. The Jordan pushes further southward along the Asian-African Rift until it dead-ends in the Dead Sea. Unable to penetrate through the Negev Desert to the Gulf of Aqabah, it dies.

God’s forgiving grace is like an immense reservoir high in the altitude of the heavenly reaches. We, however, live in this world, which we may depict as an arid wasteland of sin that, like the area of the Dead Sea, is far below sea level - and a million miles beneath the heaven of heavens. The refreshing water of the Lake of Grace has an outlet that cascades bountifully downward toward us; but artificial dams of unforgiveness, resentment, anger, and anxiety have been erected along the way, so that its flow is often less than a trickle and may not get through. We gasp dry-mouthed and thirsty, like wanderers in the Sahara looking for an oasis, when all we need to do is

destroy the dams we ourselves have erected between God's plentiful forgiveness - and our desperate need to quench our craving - for pardon's refreshment. When forgiveness is unable to penetrate the arid wasteland of pride and animosity, relationships die.

The Negev Desert and its mountain ranges, higher than the Dead Sea, impede the southward thrust of the Jordan River to the Gulf of Aqabah. Similarly, people unwilling to live in forgiveness impede the flow of grace. It is not that God is withdrawing his forgiving grace from the unforgiving; rather, we are erecting dams more eagerly than beavers or allowing deserts to blow higher than the flow of the river of grace. Love in the form of forgiving grace must be let loose lest it die.

When King Frederick William I, of Prussia lay dying, he was forewarned by his pastor that he must forgive all his enemies - including George II of England, his brother-in-law, whom he hated most. Reluctantly, Frederick told his wife, "Write to your brother and tell him I forgive him, but be sure not to do it until after my death."

When we reject forgiveness as appropriate for others, we're rejecting it as appropriate for all people, including ourselves. We are rejecting our own forgiveness in Christ - and our relationship is allowed to become a Dead Sea. C.S. Lewis tells us that to forgive for the moment is not the problem. "But to go on forgiving, to forgive the same offense again every time it recurs to the memory - there's the real tussle."

Luther says, "The love among Christians should be the same kind of love as that of every member of the body for every other one, as Paul often says, each one accepting the faults of the other, sympathizing with them, bearing and removing them, and doing everything possible to help him. Hence the doctrine of forgiveness of sins is the most important of all, both for us

personally and for our relations with others.

A pastor, upset that members were leaving his parish for another, called the other pastor and berated him. When he was told that those who were switching were people battered by personal tragedy, broken and beaten down by life, people who needed a new starting place, the original pastor shouted, "You're nothing but a bunch of garbage collectors." He saw those people as refuse!

When the accused pastor mentioned this to a group of parishioners, one of them spoke up. "Let me tell you something about garbage," he said, mentioning a former landfill not far from the church. "For ten years we used it as a place to dump trash and garbage. Know what's there now? A beautiful park." People too can go from garbage to gardens. Forgiveness turns trashy relationship into treasured ones; going from refuse to a re-fusion of former enemies into oneness.

The church is a fellowship community where dams are removed, the avalanches scooped away, the desert barriers removed, and God's grace is allowed to flow unimpeded from the reservoir of Christ's love.

Jesus provides us only one petition for the body: "Give us each day our daily bread," but two for the soul: "Forgive us our sins," and "Don't let us yield to temptation." We are to be more careful for our souls than for our bodies; more careful for grace than for daily bread; and more desirous to have our souls saved than our bodies fed.

This is the pivotal petition of the prayer, the one that involves us directly, that implores us to live in forgiveness. Let grace flow by letting go of resentment. Watch the dams burst, and the grace of God will drench you with such refreshing joy that you will know again the powerful wonder of forgiveness.

Finally, we request deliverance from temptation or “time of trial” that can cripple or destroy the soul. Immediately after Luke’s Gospel opens with a burst of Spirit-filled joy with the birth of Jesus, and shortly before it closes in the same way with his resurrection, we find references to the sort of temptations in question here. Jesus is tempted by the devil even before his ministry begins. But the Spirit who fills with joy also leads Jesus through the wilderness and teaches his followers when they face their trials.

The intent of the Lord’s Prayer is to ready disciples for difficulty, for persecution and turmoil, for a journey through life that is not always a smooth freeway, but bumpy, pothole-filled, and dangerous. Although in Luke we read: “And don’t let us yield to temptation”, in the traditional English version we pray, “Lead us not into temptation.” The apostle James explains, “When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me’. For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does God tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Why then, pray that God refrain from leading us somewhere he won’t take us to begin with?”

The Greek word Jesus uses for “*temptation*” means something other than being lured into sin. Biblical writers did not think much in terms of inner struggles between right and wrong, but in more concrete terms of ‘*testing*’ and ‘*trial*’. To *tempt* a person is not so much to seek to seduce him into sin, as it is to test his strength and his loyalty and his ability for service.

In many parts of the world and throughout history, people have faced trials and persecutions for their faith. Nien Cheng wrote in her best-selling autobiography about the persecution she met as a Christian in China. She prayed with her head bent over a copy of Mao Zedong’s book because she could not pray openly in the prison where she was confined. She found hope in a time of persecution. Solzhenitsyn, who wrote about Baptist Alyosha, drew upon his own experiences of imprisonment, when prayer offered hope

in a terror-ridden time of trial.

So too, Pavel Uhorskai, a Lutheran pastor in the former Czechoslovakia, lived out some of his persecution in a Communist prison from 1949-1953. Accused of distorting Marxist-Leninism he was asked if he had any weapons. He showed them his Bible and answered, "Yes, I have this one." They asked no further questions about weapons.

Basil, a Russian Christian spent 10 years in a labour camp for publishing Christian tracts. He discovered that he could preach in prison in the few minutes between the time the prisoners assembled in the morning to be counted and the guards came out to check on them. It took him two weeks to preach one sermon, but he did it.

In North America we are not tormented by government policy to relinquish our faith, but we are tempted by society's norms and political correctness to keep silent about God and how our lives have changed because of Him - especially about how God can change the lives of others. Trials and tests, terrors and temptations - these are what we pray God to lead us successfully to avoid.

In the petition about bread, we deal with the present; in the petition concerning forgiveness, we deal with the past; but in this petition that confronts testing and trials, we look to an uncertain future in this life. We seek release from trials and testings. Our journey in life is not always a peaceful drive along shaded lanes with a cloudless sky and a bright sun. We're often caught in emotional gusty squalls or spiritual drenching downpours. Life is not free of storms; blizzard conditions seem to immobilize us. Yet we can have sunshine in the soul.

As we pray this petition, "And don't let us yield to temptation" or "Do not bring

us to the time of trial”, let God scatter the fearsome clouds and, through his word, give you his umbrella of blessing and joyous burst of renewing sunshine.

Here is certainty on which to depend regardless of the gale force winds and the deluge. In Christ the storm is stilled. Our journey is with Christ at the lead, who squeezes us through the narrow places more easily than the broad ways that lead to destruction. Yield to no one else but him.

This speaks to this group of youth. And that is important. It is an endless circle of joy, this praying the prayer Jesus taught us and confessing the ideas he gave us, for the two actions nurture each other in Christ. He is the one who bridges the sacred and the profane with his incarnation. He is the one who made the cross a symbol of conquest rather than a lurid emblem of ruin. He made life out of death and turned sorrow into joy. In this way Jesus leads us in confessing the Lord’s Prayer, and we follow him by transforming words into action.

Only when the Lord leads us does the praying of the prayer become more than the saying of words, and the living of it celebrates the God who is God, yet truly our Father and most definitely our *Abba*. At that moment our hearts break loose into singing, and praise is not only heard upon our lips but confessed in our actions, for Jesus Christ has come and given us a prayer for all time.

Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE - PENTECOST 5 - June 23, 2024

Faithful God of love, you blessed us with your servant Son, Jesus, who modelled for us how to serve your people with justice and with mercy. We gather the needs of ourselves and others, and offer them to you in faith and love, seeking to be equipped and strengthened to serve you and the world you love so much.

Gracious God, you call the church on earth to witness to the life we receive in Jesus. Bless the delegates at the BC Synod Convention as they discuss and contemplate the future of your church and make thoughtful decisions together. Guide and inspire all Bishops; Susan, Kathy, newly elected Carly, Ali and Jason, Anglican bishops Linda, and Ana, and all priests, pastors, deacons, musicians, lay leaders and volunteers who lovingly serve. Today we pray for Good Shepherd Lutheran in Coquitlam - Rev. Eric Krushel, Trinity Lutheran in Delta - Rev. Jennifer Wilson, the Evangelical Luther Church of Jordan and the Holy Land, the congregation of San Juan Camino d'Esperanze and Pastor Ana Maria Jara.

Let us pray for the world: the harmony of all creation, heaven and earth, the oceans, lakes and streams and all that is in them, and the land, forests, and pastures and all that lives upon it. You, who keeps faith with your Creation forever, move us to recognize your benevolent care for all you have made and that beckon us work to nurture and restore its goodness. We pray also for the communities and regions impacted by recent severe weather, involving extreme flash flooding, heat domes, storms, hail, and fires. Provide them with the necessary provisions, supplies and emergency responders to begin the arduous work of clean up and rebuilding ahead.

Call those who are wise and powerful to use their gifts and influence to do justice in a world longing for peace: in Ukraine, in Israel and Gaza, in Sudan, in Haiti, in the Philippines, and all the other places facing conflict and violence. Help and comfort all people whose lives have been disrupted, irreversibly changed, and where lives have been endangered or lost through violence and war.

Let us pray for ourselves: respond to the needs of your people, gracious God, and be with the sick, comfort the grieving, and accompany all who struggle in body, mind, spirit, and especially those whom we name before you today. Pray for Pastor Kristen Steele. Let us give thanks for all who

have experienced healing: physically, mentally, spiritually or emotionally.

Continue to uphold this community of faith to proclaim Christ crucified and reach out to those who are poor, hungry, homeless, addicted to substances, or easily overlooked.

We pray for the grace to live in peace and harmony: that God will help us accept, respect, and welcome the gift of diversity found in one another, appreciate the numerous gifts that others bring, and give us patience as we strive to work together; for a new experience of grace and mercy in our lives: that God's love will free us from our past failure; give us courage to make amends; and hope to begin again in our relationships; for healing and reconciliation with our Indigenous siblings. Inspire us as we try to bring genuine, loving reconciliation to our relationships.

Holy, holy, holy God, fill us with strength and courage, with discernment and compassion, that we may be your instruments of justice and love in this world, that it may be on earth as it is in heaven. **Amen.**

Gathered into one, let us pray as Jesus taught ...

Our Father ...