

LESSONS IN LIVING

The Disciples' Prayer *Part V: Our Daily Bread*

A St. Andrew's Sermon
Delivered by Dr. Jim Rigby
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Scripture Reading: Exodus 16:13-21 (*The Inclusive Bible*)

When you ask most people who have been to college if they believe the world was created in 4004 B.C. most would say no. But if we really push on the world view that most liberal Christians have, there is still a creationism there underpinning it. Most people have never gone through the kind of radical exploration of the symbols they were given as children...and with good reason. The fear is that if you really look at these things honestly they will crumble before you. But I feel that we have a choice of either doing what our parents did to us which is to not go through that kind of pain to reframe religion, or for us to bite the bullet, honestly exploring our symbols and reframing them around the universe we know is true.

Stars start off burning hydrogen. They then produce helium and they go through the periodic chart burning off and producing elements. Once you know that and once you begin with a Big Bang beginning, at least for this part of the universe, you lose that need for an external creator. That idea that there is an external, invisible being that creates the world like a sculptor creates a pot, is broken. It is broken. *Now what the symbol points to is not broken.* The fact that we are connected to the universe - the fact that the universe has an intelligence and a pattern - all of that stuff is still true. But we need to be brave enough to reframe the language so that our children don't wind up trying to make invisible people happy by sacrificing, by begging.

We are looking at prayer in this series and one of the most important places to look is in this passage which we call "The Disciples' Prayer." Can we really ask anything in prayer? If you can't, then what is the point? If when you pray, there is nobody on the other side listening, then there is not much point in having that conversation. But what if that prayer is a symbol of a relationship to something that is so deep and primordial (which the ground of your experience is) that you just can't talk about it? When you go deeply into your experience it gets really weird. It really becomes something that is so deeply felt that you can't talk about it. That is where religion comes in. I absolutely

believe that the symbols point to something that is true. But every symbol is like a vessel, too, and when you are given a vessel from a world view that is from two thousand years ago, it needs a little tweaking. So we are going to look at this passage. (Is everybody okay? Is everybody breathing? Keep breathing.)

Faith means that if we are radically honest there will be something on the other side of that honesty. To me, dishonest belief proclaims that if I ever really look at my ideas they are going to crumble in my hand, so I am not going to examine them. Probably, as a child, you were taught that is what faith is. Faith is a pious dishonesty. Don't ever look directly at your belief system because, for a lot of people, it is dead. That is what happens when you don't keep reframing it - when you are not honest enough to go through the crises of restating things. The symbols point to something that is absolutely true. It always has been true. My guess is it always will be true, but you have to change your container of that mystery if you are going to stay in touch with it. Jesus said, "Give us this day our daily bread." It raises the question, what do we need? Deeply, profoundly, what do you need to be who you are? Jesus is saying prayer will take you into that depth and feed you in a way that many other things do not.

Now the reference here is to - Do you remember the story that we just read? – The Israelites are in the desert. They are in the desert because they were slaves in Egypt. They are being delivered, but they are in the desert now, and it is really uncomfortable. It is sticky, hot, and they are getting hungry. When scripture talks about the wilderness or the desert, what it means is any place that does not feel like home. It doesn't necessarily have cactuses but you are in transition. You are unsettled. It does not feel like home. In other words, it is like many of the times in your life when you are unsettled. This passage is going to refer to what feeds you in those times. The scripture says that the people started grumbling (which is a nice word for it). They were saying, "You know we did not like slavery, but at least we had good food." When you are in transition, you are in turmoil. It feels like confusion. It doesn't feel good and you can long for things from your past that were really quite unhappy. Whenever we think we can get back to a former happiness we are about to make a mistake, because life can only be lived in a forward direction

This symbol of bread, this symbol of manna is very interesting. It comes in the morning like the dew and it disappears. If you try to store it, it turns bad on you. It is talking about the religious life. What feeds you is much closer to awareness than bread, but bread is going to be the symbol of it. How do I know that? Because if you look at the scriptures of the world this is a symbol that reoccurs. It is soma in India. But if you look closely it is not very much like bread at all. Bread doesn't start up in the morning and come up with the dew. It is a symbol of the basic sweetness of life when we are not asking anything more of it. The reason Jesus says "Give us our daily bread" and not give us this day our *daily cake* is very important, because the symbol is what you *need*, not what you *want*.

Learning to separate what you want from what you need can be one of the most important realizations in life. The spiritual life will give you what you need, but you will be spending a lot of time in life not getting what you want. More often, the quest for what you want leads back to your old slavery. When you have been given a religion that is

supposed to make you comfortable, it is a religion of chains. The kind of growth and transformation that true spirituality calls us to is not always comfortable. At times it is very uncomfortable, but the peace and joy that it gives is worth the journey. What is being talked about is not the final motel room where you will be happy for all time. That is what we think we want...the answer to all of our questions. What it is, though, is food for the journey. It is making your path rich enough so that you are fed along the way.

The idea that somebody outside your experience has crafted everything, the idea that the universe was designed *for you* is a heartbreaking mistake. I call to reference your own experience, however long you have lived, and the disappointments that no loving parent would have visited on you. Since Charles Darwin we know that the world was not created like that. Yes, I know it is a theory but it has got a whole lot more evidence than the other theories. When we think that some invisible person has crafted the world for us, we think the world owes us something and when we don't get it, we resent it.

I stayed in a bad hotel this weekend, so the metaphor came to me of the type of prayer where you think that basically God has made this kind of world and is not doing a very good job. You are calling room service saying "My life leaks. Could you help me out here?" When that doesn't happen you are going to lose your connection. If the only symbol you have is of this external Santa Claus who is watching over and taking care of you, it is not going to take a whole lot of flat tires before you are going to lose that sense. What I want to tell you is that the symbol is pointing to something that is absolutely real. It is coming from the inside out. Why is it presented as a symbol that is inside out? Because that is what we need - that is how we appropriate information. Your body needs symbols to link itself to this depth. The very fact that you have emerged from the universe means that your body remembers the connections. Prayer is not complaining to the landlord about the lodgings. It is getting still and quiet and feeling the connection, feeling the fact that you are flowing from something that is prior to you, that is deeper than you, that is bigger than you. It gives you the same answers but this time they are pointing to the experience you are *going to have* and not some imaginary thing that you *want to have*.

Here is the image that occurred to me this week. See if it is helpful or not: Prayer is not like complaining to the landlord. It is like a safecracker holding very still until they can feel the tumblers...that silent something beneath your experience that shapes everything. Life is not random. A deck of cards is not random. Does anybody here play blackjack? If I draw two cards and one of them is a King or Queen and the other is an eight, should I draw another card? If cards are random, then why...why does a professional bridge player win and the amateur not win? Because there are patterns. They are much more nuanced than some external parent would do, but there are predictable, inevitable patterns that you can tune yourself to and get what you need out of life. That is what is being talked about here. That idea of the world we see being this heartbreaking experience is seen as an illusion. It doesn't mean it is not true. You know if you take a stick and put it in water how it looks like it bends. In these mystical traditions what they are saying is the idea that you are separate from other people is an illusion. The idea that you are disconnected from the ground of your being is an illusion. Prayer is getting very still. It is

not reaching for what you don't have. It is clearing the trance that your culture has given you. It is clearing the trance that your wants and your fears give you and are projected over this bread that feeds you. When we enter life and accept it on its own terms and we stop grumbling about it, it feeds us. *It doesn't take us where we want to go but it will take us where we need to go.* You need never question whether the ground of things knows you are here. That is where you are coming from. You are a child of whatever intelligence gives birth. Whatever those patterns are, whatever the tumblers are, you are a child of that, you are a product of that. Prayer is getting still and quiet enough where you can feel it and hear it. Then you go out into your life with trust.

The bread is a mystical symbol. In Hebrew manna means "what is this." I heard a wonderful story at Presbytery. I thought I was really smart to know that "what is this." Another minister said they were preaching on manna this weekend. So I used my one little bit of information so that I could look smart and he told me something that blew me away. He said, "Well did you know where the word *kangaroo* comes from?" I thought well that is weird but, "No I don't." He said that when the Europeans got to Australia they saw these weird rats jumping up and down with their pockets and said, "What is that?" According to this person the Aborigines said, "Kangaroo." What they didn't realize is that *kangaroo* means "I don't know". I don't know if that is true but it is a wonderful story. The truth of it is that they would not know what a kangaroo is but they might know who a kangaroo is because they didn't live in a world of objects. They lived in an intimate world where all the plants and animals are family. That is also the world that prayer reveals to you and me. It is not a hotel room where we have to bang on the wall and say, "Please God please cut me some slack." Can you really worship a God that you have to beg to get good room service? It is more like the safecracker, who by going deeper by listening more deeply and quietly, realizes that there are tumblers underneath what is happening. There are patterns beneath what is happening. There is intelligence beneath what is happening. It doesn't give us what we want but it does give us what we need. It is not a permanent place of comfort and safety but it is a calling of transformation and it is food for the journey.

Transcribed and edited by a member of the St. Andrew's Sermon Transcription Project.

The Disciples' Prayer Series

Part I: February 7, 2010, Matthew 6:7-13 (*The Inclusive Bible*)

Part II: February 14, 2010, John 14:1-4; 8-19 (*The New Oxford Bible*);
World Scripture: Chandogya Upanishad

Part III: Hallowed Be Thy Name. February 21, 2010, John 8:30-59; Exodus 3:13-17 (*The Inclusive Bible*)

Part IV: Thy Kingdom Come. February 28, 2010, Matthew 6:25-31 (*The Inclusive Bible*)

Part V: Our Daily Bread. March 7, 2010, Exodus 16:13-21 (*The Inclusive Bible*)

Part VI: Forgive Us Our Debts. March 14, 2010, Matthew 18:21-35 (*The Inclusive Bible*)

Part VII: Lead Us Not Into Temptation. March 21, 2010, Matthew 4:1-11 (*The Inclusive Bible*)

Part VIII: For Thine is the Kingdom. March 28, 2010, Acts 4:32-5:6 (*The Inclusive Bible*)

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14311 Wells Port Drive, Austin, Texas 78728 · (512) 251-0698 · Fax: (512) 251-2617 www.staopen.com