

January 1-2, 2010

Series: *Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread*

Title: *Living on a Prayer*

Theme: *Prayer is a lived response to our trust in God. To petition, give us this day our daily bread, is to trust that God will provide.*

Text: 2 Timothy 1: 8 – 13

Notes on the Text:

Paul writes from prison, probably awaiting execution under Nero. As he languishes in his cell his thoughts turn to the future, especially to his protégé, Timothy. Paul's primary purpose in writing this letter is to motivate and inspire Timothy in his ministry and leadership.

Shame plays a prominent role in our text, bookending it in verses 8 and 12. Paul tells Timothy not to be ashamed of the Gospel (it is foolishness to the Gentiles, 1 Corinthians 1:23), or of Paul's suffering (imprisonment). In addition, Paul is not ashamed of his suffering. Shame played a much greater role in Paul's culture than it does in ours. In Roman culture the cross was significant not because it was the most painful way that the Romans knew how to execute someone (it wasn't) but because it shamed the one who was crucified.

Instead of being ashamed of suffering Paul invites Timothy to embrace suffering, to join Paul in suffering for the sake of the Gospel. This suffering is apparently emotional and relational (shamed by the community) as well as potentially physical (imprisonment and execution). To embrace suffering will require Timothy to rely upon the power of God, the God who saves and calls.

For Paul, the ability to endure suffering, to proclaim the Gospel and live out his "holy calling" comes from knowing "the one in whom I have put my trust." This one is able to provide power. Paul trusted God to "guard until that day what I have entrusted to him." But what does that mean? What has Paul entrusted to God? Several possibilities have been offered:

- Paul knew that God would guard the souls of those converted through his preaching;
- Paul trusted God to guard his own soul until Christ's second coming; or
- Paul was confident that, though he was in prison and facing death, God would carry out the gospel ministry and guard the teaching through others such as Timothy.

Given the larger context of the letter the third option seems most likely.

Preaching Possibilities

What we mean when we pray for daily bread depends upon our circumstances. For those who are on the edge of starvation and who wonder where their next meal will come from the prayer perhaps takes on a literal meaning. For those of us who have more than enough physical bread for today, tomorrow and the next month it can mean a whole host of other things. But the question we really need to deal with is what this petition meant in the context of Jesus' teaching. So, let's consider it briefly from the Gospel of Matthew where the Lord's Prayer is taught in the context of the Sermon on the Mount. While the petition "give us this day our daily bread" is often connected with a petition for daily sustenance – often connected with manna in Exodus – Matthew's context raises some interesting challenges to that perspective.

First, for Matthew this entire prayer is a prayer for God's Kingdom to come, for God's reign to be experienced on earth as in heaven. In addition, just a few lines beforehand (Matthew 6:8) Jesus tells his disciples that God already knows what they need. Why, then, the need to pray for daily sustenance? In addition the Greek word translated "daily" (epiousios) only appears twice in the Bible (in the Lord's Prayer) and nowhere else in all of known Greek literature. In fact some scholars have wondered if Jesus or the Gospel writers actually made the word up! A better translation of the verse may actually be "give us the bread of the coming day."

In Scripture the coming Day of the Lord is often associated with a great banquet in which abundance will overwhelm us. So, perhaps this petition is not for daily sustenance (as we have so often supposed) but a request for a foretaste of the feast to come, just a nibble to sustain our faith that God IS at work in the world today and that one day God's reign will be fully and finally revealed. This understanding of the petition would also make sense in light of Matthew 5:6, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (the revealing of the Kingdom) for they shall be filled." This certainly doesn't mean that we can't pray for daily sustenance, nor am I suggesting that this petition DEFINITELY doesn't mean that...but it does seem to me to make more sense translated this way. It also helps me make sense of the reality that millions pray this prayer and yet physically starve to death in our world.

So, perhaps praying for daily bread doesn't mean asking for daily provision. It certainly doesn't mean "save me from shame" because Paul and Timothy endure shame for the sake of the Gospel. It certainly doesn't mean "save me from suffering" because Paul invites Timothy to embrace suffering. And it certainly doesn't mean "save me from an unfair and unjust death" because Paul seems to embrace that too.

In light of the fact that this petition is also plural (give US this day OUR daily bread...not ME and MY) we are also praying that all may be fed with what they need, especially hope. So, consider the implications of this petition for our moving into Feed My Starving Children. Not only will we be answering our own prayer by feeding hungry children, but the very fact that God's people are moved to feed hungry children IS a "nibble" of God's Kingdom in our midst. How cool is that?

And isn't it cool that this is a Communion Weekend...in which we'll all partake of the great Foretaste of the Feast to come? We can pray this petition and experience the answer immediately!

Suggestion: The connection of this theme and the suggested text (2 Timothy) is, in my opinion, really weak. In fact, since this weekend starts the entire series I would suggest we use Matthew 6:5-15 to talk more directly about the prayer. If 2 Timothy is a lectionary text (and I don't think it is) perhaps we can use it as a secondary text and I can work it into the sermon.