

Give Us Our Daily Bread

I'm sure that our hearts were moved by the scenes that we have witnessed in Afghanistan last week!!!! Isn't it tragic, what can we say, what can we do? except pray, *God Help us, help them!*

Scenes similar to this are in the Bible.

The Israelites escaping Egypt, escaping the cruelty of Pharaoh, and finding themselves in the desert, hungry and thirsty.

Yes, to escape Afghanistan may seem like a passage to safety but then what?

It didn't take the Israelites long to cry out to God, after they had left Egypt, *why have you taken us here – to die in this desert?*

This morning, we continue our reflections on the Lord's Prayer, and we focus on the petition, *"Give us our daily bread,"* five words which have much to teach us about faith.

The prayer reminds us, who we are praying to.

The famous evangelist DL Moody told the story of a Chinese convert who gave his testimony. He said, 'I was down in a deep pit, half sunk in the mire, crying for someone to help me out. As I looked up, I saw a venerable grey-haired man looking down at me. I said, can you help me out? "My Son" he replied, "I am Confucius. If you had read my books and followed what I taught, you would never have fallen into this dreadful pit." '

'Then he was gone. Soon, I saw another man coming. He bent over me with closed eyes and folded arms. "My Son", he said, "I am Buddha, forget about yourself. Get into a state of rest. Then, my child, you will be in a delicious state just as I am." "Yes," I said, "I will do that when I am above this mire. Can you help me out?" I looked and he was gone.'

'I was beginning to sink into despair when I saw another figure above me. There were marks of suffering on his face. "My Child," he said, "what is the matter?" But before I could reply, he was down in the mire by my side. He folded his arms about me and lifted me up and then fed and rested me. When I was well, he did not say, "Shame on you for falling into the pit." Instead, he said, "We will walk on together now", and we have been walking together until this day.'

This beautiful story gives us an insight into who Jesus is and why he came to earth. He came to *"Give us our daily bread"*.

Now to us, who I trust are well fed and very rarely go hungry, this petition may seem somewhat a nice thing to say, but if you are escaping Kabul with nothing but a rucksack and a prayer, this prayer today may be your lifeline.

Give us our daily bread!

For it is a prayer about survival!

For this prayer tells us that God cares for us as human beings.

It is the starting point for faith.

It is literally saying...*Our Father in heaven, Give us!*

Willie Barclay wrote, "It's not simply soul salvation that we need but whole salvation." This prayer tells us that we have a God who can supply our basic needs. We have a God who enters our pit and lifts us out and walks with us.

It tells us that we have a God who wants to nourish us and care for us as human beings.

A God who desires to bless us with the basic necessities of life. We are called to pray for daily bread, enough for the day ahead!

But who is this God? Well, the answer lies in the One who is teaching the prayer to his disciples.

The Apostle Paul wrote, *In Jesus we see the image of the invisible God.*

When we consider the life of Jesus, he really did care for humanity, and he was especially empathetic with the poor and the needy. He spent much of his time healing people's broken bodies. He saw himself waging a battle against evil. He recognised that there was an enemy in this world, an intruder who has come to disrupt and to create hell on earth.

At times, he was anguished. When his friend Lazarus died, the shortest verse in the Bible is words about Jesus. *"He wept."* Why did he weep? – Was it that he saw the destruction that evil has caused in the world – even death?

This is the God that we pray to.

How would Jesus have reacted to the scenes in Kabul today and at the airport, when he sees children being passed over the heads of others to reach the

soldiers? Just like Moses was placed in a basket in the Nile to escape death, so these mothers are placing their faith, their trust in God or in the Universe, that their child would escape and find a place to grow up in safety. Who knows, maybe like Moses' mother they prayed for a miracle, that a princess might find their child.

When the crowds came to Jesus, he was moved and touched by them and after listening to him throughout the day, he knew they were hungry and had nowhere to get food and so he supplied their daily bread.

God knows what it is to be a human because that is the Christian story, He came to this world, and became a human being, he was made flesh like us. John announces in his Gospel, *"The word became flesh and dwelt amongst us"*. The God we worship has experienced hunger and thirst. That's what our Bibles tell us. That he has come to us and experienced the very worst, yes abandonment on the cross. He has literally gone to hell for us! That is why with confidence, we can pray, *Give us today, our daily bread!*

Secondly what does this God expect of us?

This petition very wisely reminds us of how prayer works. It's not a case of simply praying this prayer, closing our eyes and hoping that food will arrive. It may do, but faith and works go hand in hand. We pray, and God expects us to produce, where we can, our own bread.

It is true that the living seed comes from God, but it is equally true that it is our task to grow and cultivate the seed.

There is a lovely story told of a man who had a small piece of land. He reclaimed the land with hard work, cutting back the weeds and clearing the stones. He nourished the ground and planted seeds until it produced the loveliest of flowers and vegetables. One evening he was showing a religious friend around his plot and the friend said, "It's wonderful what God can do with a lot of ground like this?" "Yes", said the man who had put in such hard work, "but you should have seen this bit of ground when God had it to Himself!"

God's grace and man's work must combine. Prayer, like faith, without works is dead. When we pray, we recognise two basic truths, that without God we can do nothing and that without our efforts and cooperation God can do nothing

for us. So, when we say *Give us our daily bread*, God is expecting us to step out in faith.

There is a very important word in the prayer and it is the word US. We belong together!

Give us our daily bread. It doesn't say, *give me*. The problem with the world is not that there is not enough to go around; there is enough and spare. The problem is not the supply of life's essentials but the distribution.

I received an email from one of our Church of Scotland missionary partners in Malawi – Colin Brough - and it was a challenging read. He writes, “One of the ‘measures’ for travel safety is the percentage of a country that is vaccinated. Yet the UK and others are now putting their foot on the supply pipe again by beginning a booster programme. The third dose for some, while only 1.3% of people in resource-poor countries have even received a single dose.”

1.3% of the population of Malawi and you can guess who that 1.3% will be, certainly not the thirsty and the hungry.

This prayer of Jesus teaches us an important lesson about sharing and that we live in a world where sharing is the only way that we can survive as a human race. So, by praying this, we are praying for others too and it's a prayer that needs to be said with Afghanistan and the Malawian people in mind. A prayer that God will supply them with all their daily needs for survival. A prayer, yes, that we will receive our daily bread, but we will also share our daily bread.

Jesus called himself the “Bread of Life”.

This is an important aspect of prayer, for God not only fills our physical body with food but he can fill our spiritual lives with the great truth that indeed He is the Bread of Life. It is no accident that at communion we share in bread together. The bread being symbolic for his body broken for us. So, when we pray this, we are praying for his Spirit to feed our souls, we are praying that we would receive from Christ his eternal Word and life-giving spirit.

We need the two to survive, food and spirit, and so this reminder is a reminder of the importance of both.

But again, it is done in community, *give us we pray*. It is not merely an individual pursuit but it is the pursuit of the community and that is why it's

important for us to keep on meeting here in church on a Sunday, we feed our souls with Christ. Yes, we can do it online, and to a certain degree that will feed us spiritually but to come together, face to face, to worship at His throne, together, to pray together, to hear God's word together, there is no substitute for this.

I started with Afghanistan and asked what can we do?

This prayer tells us simply, Pray, for the nation, pray for the innocent sufferers, pray for those living in fear, pray for the children and pray for those who have escaped out of the melting pot, that for them, it's not a case of out of the frying pan and into the fire, that they will receive love and grace and mercy wherever they may end up.

Martin Luther was known for praying three hours a day. When he began the work that became the Reformation, his friend Myconius said, "I can best help where I am. I will remain and pray while you toil." Then, one-night Myconius dreamed that Jesus approached him and showed him his hands and feet, wounded by his crucifixion. He looked into the eyes of his Saviour and heard Jesus say to him, "Follow me". Jesus led him to a mountain top and pointed eastwards, Myconius looked and saw a plain stretching away to the horizon. It was dotted with thousands and thousands of white sheep. One man was trying to shepherd the great flock. Myconius recognised him as his good friend Martin Luther. The Saviour then pointed westwards and Myconius saw a great field of standing corn. Only one reaper was trying to harvest it all. The lonely labourer was obviously exhausted, but he persisted. Myconius recognised the solitary reaper, again, it was Luther.

"It is not enough that I should pray," said Myconius when he awoke. The sheep must be shepherded; the field must be reaped. Here am I; send me. He immediately sought out Luther and volunteered to serve in whatever capacity Luther desired.

So, today when we pray, "*Give us our daily bread*" are you praying to help or to be of help?

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit

Amen.