

Ps 145:4
Hy 1A
Ps 107:1,3,4
Ps 36:2,3
Ps 105:14,15; Hy 47:5
Luke 9:1-17
Deuteronomy 16:13-15
Philippians 4:10-20
Lord's Day 50

Yarrow, March 20, 2011

Beloved Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ!

The fourth petition teaches us to ask for “daily bread”. We realize that with this petition we don’t ask only for bread itself, but also for anything else we need to eat, as well as the clothes, shelter, care and so many other things we need in life. That’s why the Catechism also speaks about “all our bodily needs.”

It’s probably true to say that this fourth petition is the one that gets the most attention in our prayers. I mean: so much of what we speak to God about falls best under the fourth petition. We ask for food, we ask for sleep, we ask for safety on the roads, we ask for strength to be good parents for our children, we ask for wisdom to do our work well, and the list goes on – and all of these things fall under the fourth petition. It makes one wonder: why is this the *fourth* petition? Shouldn’t it be the first??

There’s a second problem we have with this petition. We’re told to pray for *daily* bread, and that comes across to us as meaning that we’re to pray for *small amounts*, the needs for one day. It strikes us as a bit measly..., like the Lord doesn’t give us an awful lot.... But isn’t He a God of *abundant* blessing?

Concerns as these suggest we’re misunderstanding something about the meaning of the fourth petition. As He teaches us to pray, our chief Prophet and Teacher instructs us *how to think*, who should be central to our thinking, and how valuable it is to trust Him.

I summarize the sermon with this theme:

WE PRAY THAT GOD RESTORE TO US A TASTE OF PARADISE.

1. The Setting of this Petition,
2. The Implication of this Petition,
3. The Answer to this Petition.

1. The Setting of this Petition

It was the *disciples* who first asked Jesus for instruction on how to pray, and so Jesus taught *them* this fourth petition. What, we wonder, did the disciples hear Jesus teach them when He told them to ask the Father for their daily bread??

By the time Jesus taught the Twelve the Lord’s Prayer, they had followed Jesus through Galilee and Judea for a number of months. In the course of those months, they had learned much from Jesus’ words and works. Consider the following:

- Peter, James and John were earning their daily bread through their fishing business. I read in Luke 5 that between the three of them they had two boats on the Sea of Galilee (mentioned in that chapter

as the Lake of Gennesaret). Jesus one day used Peter's boat as a pulpit from which to preach to the crowds on the shore, then told Peter to put out into deep water to fish (cf vs 4). Peter, professional and competent fisherman as he was, mentioned the futility of the effort, for they'd been fishing all night (and on the Sea of Galilee that was the time to fish) and caught nothing..., so why try during the day.... What did Jesus the carpenter know about fishing.... Yet Peter did as commanded, and lo, one cast of the net ensnared so many fish that help was needed from the second boat to get the catch to shore. And then?? Vs 11: "they pulled their boats up on the shore, left everything and followed Him." What that looked like?? Two boats lying there, deserted except for all those fish – going bad in the hot sun.... That's the wages for tomorrow's breakfast, lunch, and dinner.... A big waste, we say..., but Peter, James and John didn't think so; they followed Jesus. Why?? Why did they desert their work and their catch, their income for tomorrow's meal??

- Jesus passed by the booth of the tax collector Levi (also known as Matthew). Here was another business man who earned his daily bread through hard labour, imposing taxes on people and forcing them to pay up. Jesus called on him to "follow Me" (vs 27), and Levi promptly "got up, left everything and followed Him" (vs 28). Count on it, congregation: as the people passed his toll booth, they didn't leave their taxes on his table for Levi to collect later in the day. There went his wages..., and tomorrow's food.... On top of that, Levi threw "a great banquet for Jesus as his house." Point: Levi doesn't only forego his income, he also blows his savings on a party. Why?? Is that responsible??
- As the disciples keep following Jesus, they listen to His instruction about food. They hear Him say the words of Luke 6:20f: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied." Conversely in Luke 6:24f: "But woe to you who are rich, for you already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry." Those words certainly mean at least that the Lord of the kingdom will supply daily bread..., and take it from those who don't wait for Him to serve it.... And as for the attitude those of His kingdom are to embrace, Jesus says in that same sermon, "Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back" (6:30). That would include what's in your pantry..., your daily bread.... Why that?! Then you have nothing left for yourself! Why does Jesus give this instruction?!
- The instruction to the Twelve continued. Notice Jesus' own example, how He lived, what He owned. Luke 8:1: Jesus and the Twelve travelled from town to village, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. Yet where did their daily bread come from?? Vs 3 prints a list of women, then adds this note, "These women were helping to support them out of their own means." Jesus even adds in 9:58 that He owns nothing, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head." No place called home, no table for breakfast, no pantry, no fridge.... And that's the example for the disciples?? Why's that?!
- Then there's the odd instruction of Luke 9. Jesus called the Twelve to Him, gave them power and authority to drive out demons, cure diseases, preach the kingdom, heal the sick – and told them as they hit the road to take no lunch and no wallet – and so they couldn't go to Timmy's for a bite (vs 3). So what are they going to eat as they walk from town to village with their words of the kingdom and their works of miracles?? Live off their fat?? Or just depend on people's generosity? Isn't that risky..., and presumptuous?
- And what are we to make of what happens when the disciples return to Jesus with their report? Luke 9:10: Jesus pulled the Twelve aside to Bethsaida for a break..., but the crowds followed and Jesus taught them more about the kingdom of God and healed their sick (vs 11). When the disciples

late in the afternoon suggested that Jesus dismiss the crowds on grounds that they'll need food and lodging, Jesus told them –get this!– to “give them something to eat.” It's a crowd of 5000 men plus women and children, and the disciples (they weren't to take food or wallet with them in the morning) are now to give supper to so many?? What's Jesus thinking?! It turns out the disciples can find 5 loaves and 2 fish in the crowd..., and that's what they bring to Jesus. And see what happens; He prayed, broke the bread and the fish..., gave the pieces to the disciples for distribution.... Vs 17: “they all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.” Amazing! Why did Jesus multiply so little into so much?? And: why did each disciple end up with a basketful of pieces under his arm?? What were they to learn?

Yes, congregation, what were the disciples to learn?? They see Jesus pray one day, and so ask their Master to teach them to pray. He tells them that they're to talk to God about ... *the very topic He had pressed upon them through the boat load of fish they caught the other day and left on the beach, and the closed tax booth and the resulting party.* He tells them to talk to God about ... *Jesus' lifestyle of dependence on the women for His daily bread, and the fact that they were to take no lunch and no wallet with them as they preached and healed, and about how He multiplied five loaves and two fish into food for thousands.* They are, says Jesus, to ask God to “give us each day our daily bread.”

The point? This: the disciples' heads are not to be filled with thoughts about how to earn tomorrow's food or how to pay tomorrow's bills or how to finance the next addition to the house or the next holiday. They're to bring such mundane problems to their Father in heaven for solutions.

But if their heads are not to be filled with such practical and daily needs, what are those heads to be filled with instead?? What's the implication of this petition? That brings us to our second point:

2. The Implication of this Petition

We take it for granted in this fallen world that we have to work in order to eat. I mean: we well realize that if all Canadians stopped working our economy would grind to a quick halt, our stores would very soon be empty, and we'd all go hungry and perish. Admittedly, our society has a bit of a buffer so as to absorb the fact that some Canadians can't work or refuse to work, but they're the exceptions. The principle is clear: without work we won't eat. It's even a Biblical command that we work in order to eat, for Paul in his letter reminds the Thessalonians of the rule he taught them when he lived among them, “If a man will not work, he shall not eat” (2 Thessalonians 3:10). The Christian is simply not to be a loafer. It's a principle our deacons –and we all– need to work with.

But take your thoughts, now, congregation, back to Paradise. Did Adam in fact have to work in order to eat?? Was his daily bread in the Garden the product of his sweat and his effort? It was not. God placed the man He created in a Garden of Plenty, for Paradise (says Genesis 2:9) had “all kinds of trees ... that were pleasing to the eye and good for good.” Adam was free to help himself to every apple tree in the garden, every orange tree, every banana tree, every mango tree, plum tree, grape vine, etc..., except, of course, that one tree in the middle of the Garden. Point? The Lord his God freely and generously gave Adam his daily bread *without Adam having to sweat and toil for it.* That's not to say that Adam wouldn't have to work for God placed him in the Garden with the command to “work it and take care of it” (Genesis 2:15). But the order is clear: God gave him abundant daily bread so that Adam might be able to work well.... First came the food, then the work.

The fall into sin, of course, changed things radically. God cursed the ground because of Adam's sin, so that from now on “through painful toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life” (Genesis 3:17). From now on the fruit trees would contend for space with thorns and thistles, and the crop would be tormented by insects and blight and inclement weather and wild animals and the list goes on. Adam

and Eve and Cain and Abel would have to *work*, and work *hard*, to get daily bread on the table.... In Paradise they ate in order to work; after the fall they had to work in order to eat, yes, work to survive.... And they'd still peter out and die.... What Israel experienced in Egypt when they were slaves to Pharaoh pictures something of what the fall into sin meant; they were slaves told to work, hard, and they surely received no more bread to eat than was necessary to slave on.... Pharaoh insisted they think of work, work, work....

How wonderful God's goodness was for Israel, then, when He redeemed them from their slavery! The Lord promised His people-by-covenant a land rich in crops and abundant in food where they would not have to sweat and toil in order to eat, for this is a land, said God, that flowed with milk and honey since "it is a land the LORD your God cares for" so that He sends rain in season to make the crops grow (Deuteronomy 11:10ff). When the twelve spies came back from exploring this land they took with them a single cluster of grapes so big that it took two men to carry that one cluster (Numbers 13:23). Here was a land where *God was supplying His people's daily bread, abundantly*. Why would He supply bread, instead of insisting that the people toil for it?? That, brothers and sisters, is because *He was restoring Paradise for His own*, taking away the sin that drove His people away from His presence! Behind the abundance of food lay the gospel of redemption!

To drive that point home the Lord took His people through the desert for a number of years before He brought them into that land of Promise. That desert simply had no food for God's people, so that no matter how hard the people toiled and laboured they could not get their breakfast and lunch and supper together. So what did the Lord do? Each morning anew He delivered manna to the camp of the Israelites. As Adam and Eve in Paradise needed to do nothing more than take fruit from the trees, so God's redeemed people Israel needed to do nothing more than scoop food of the ground. In the midst of the camp of the Israelites stood the tabernacle with its altar that proclaimed the gospel of the forgiveness of sins through Jesus' blood; the animal died in place of the sinner so that the sinner might be able again to live with God. Because the fall into sin was in principle undone through the work of the coming Saviour, the curse of shortage was in principle taken away again too; God in the desert gave His people a Paradise Restored inasmuch as He supplied daily bread. And do not think, congregation, that God was measly in how much He gave His people or in the lack of variety He gave. They could collect as much as they wanted, and God saw to it that when their stomachs were full when their tables were empty. Daily bread, abundantly provided.... And tomorrow He'd give it again. Paradise restored, because sin is forgiven! What glorious gospel; man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD (Deuteronomy 8:3).

Again, the Lord said more about the wealth of the redemption promised through the coming Saviour. Once settled in the Promised Land, the people of Israel were commanded –yes, *commanded!*– to hold a number of feasts each year. Deuteronomy 16: "Celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days after you have gathered the produce of threshing floor" (vs 13). Question: when was the last time you feasted *for seven days straight*? Yet that's the command: "Be joyful at your Feast.... For the LORD your God will bless you in all your harvest and in all the work of your hands, and your joy will be complete" (vs 14f). Slave, sweat, toil, in order to eat?? Not during that feast! For the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ promises Paradise Restored!

Did the people of Israel in fact feast and celebrate as the Lord told them to?? We read so little about it.... And perhaps that's understandable, for so much brokenness remained. Yet the promise of the Lord's care remained real, and so Isaiah could utter this remarkable prophecy: "On this mountain" – that's where the temple stands, where God dwells with His people!– "on this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine – the best of meats and

the finest of wines" (Isaiah 25:6). And the prophet ties this promise directly to the defeat of death; sin is taken away!

And now there's Jesus, and the disciples watch what He's doing. They see Him providing for them a net full of fish, many days' wages, far more than they need for their daily bread. So they leave their fish and their boats, and they follow Him *because in this Jesus of Nazareth God is fulfilling the promises of restoring Paradise!* Levi leaves his tax office and spends his savings on a banquet *precisely because he recognizes in Jesus Christ the fulfillment of God's promises*; he doesn't have to work in order to eat anymore because God the Father will provide for his daily bread! Jesus gives instruction about the hungry in the kingdom of heaven being satisfied and the rich of this world becoming hungry, and to the disciples' ears this all fits in directly with God's Old Testament promises of returning His people to the abundance of Paradise; He'll supply for His children's needs. So Jesus and the Twelve could do their daily work of preaching and teaching and healing, and the Father in heaven supplied their needs through the women who accompanied them. The disciples could even go a preaching tour without bread or wallet, and did not have to puzzle where their lunch would come from, for their Father in heaven would supply; for Him it was no big thing to feed 5000 men with 5 loaves and 2 fish – and still press a basket of food into the arms of each disciple. *That's the mercy and the care of their Father in Jesus Christ – a mercy made possible because the Son of God had come to pay for sin and reconcile sinners to God.*

So: what shall the disciples pray for?? Simple: they shall ask God to do for them what He'd promised in the Old Testament to do for His people, and that is: give to them again, day by day, the abundance of Paradise! Christ has come to atone for sin, to take away the effects of the fall – including the sweat and the toil of getting bread on the table! So the disciples may turn to the God of Paradise and ask Him again for daily bread, *and they were to believe that their Father would certainly supply.* He, after all, is faithful to His promises!

You see, congregation, there's so much in that fourth petition! Imagine the privilege: reminding God of His own promises and asking Him to do as He'd said! You think He'd fail to answer??

That's our third point:

3. The Answer to this Petition.

Christ Jesus actually went to the cross, paid for sin, reconciled sinners to God. He died, arose, ascended into heaven, and was enthroned as King of kings and Lord of lords – and all the while intercedes before the Father for the needs of His people. More, He poured out His Holy Spirit through whom He dwells with and in His own.

What, now, did the believers on the day of Pentecost think in relation to daily needs? Did they leave the house where Peter delivered His Pentecost sermon with a head full of anxiety about how to get bread on the table tomorrow, how to pay the bills, how to organize a comfortable retirement? Listen to Acts 2: "they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, the breaking of bread and to prayer" (vs 42). What prayer, do you think, would that have been? Given what Jesus had instructed His disciples to pray, that prayer would surely have included the fourth petition, "Give us each day –today too!– our daily bread." More, the text tells us that they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching – and surely that included what the disciples said about the background to this fourth petition as they'd experienced it themselves. So what did those early Christians do?? Vs 44f: "All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need." We recognize it: there's the attitude of the women who served Jesus and the Twelve (Luke 8:3). How could they dare to give away their surplus? That's for the same reason why

Peter and James and John could leave their boats with their enormous catch on the beach, and for the same reason why Levi could throw a party for Jesus. Here's the confidence that the kingdom of God has come, that Paradise is in principle restored, that sinners are reconciled to God so that God will supply again the abundance Adam had in Paradise and Israel had in the desert. They could travel the roads of life without lunch or wallet because they knew their Father in Jesus Christ was mighty and was willing to give His people the bread they needed today and everyday – and the clothes and the house and so much more too. Children of God need not store up treasures for themselves on earth where moth and rust and thieves and inflation and market collapse and earthquake and nuclear meltdown and so many dangers eat away at our savings, for the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has promised to supply the needs of His own. We need but ask Him to “give us each day our daily bread,” and the Father will give so much more than we really need! *That's His promise!*

The apostle Paul catches something of this sure confidence in the words he wrote to the Philippians. “I have learned,” he writes, “to be content whatever my circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through Him who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:11ff). What that secret is? It is the Lord who gives daily bread! That was Adam's reality in Paradise, that was Israel's experience in the desert, that was the promise the Lord gave to His people as they entered the Promised Land, that was the delightful experience of the disciples as they walked with Jesus through Galilee and of the first believers on the day of Pentecost. Paul can stand in a long row of God's children-by-covenant who can experience for themselves that their Father in Jesus Christ is gracious and faithful. That is why the apostle is not anxious about tomorrow's needs, or about what his retirement will look like, or who will pay his medical bills. *His Father will supply.*

Does that mean that the apostle will receive whatever he would *like* to receive?? No, not at all. Israel had to be content with manna, always manna; never did they awaken to find leeks and onions and cucumbers, or even beefsteaks and pork, scattered around their tents – though they craved it. The early Christians had to be content with persecution, and we understand very well that persecution has an impact on what's in the pantry. Paul himself in Philippians 4 was in prison, limited to a room with a stone floor and probably with rats for company. And he certainly didn't have a fridge....

But that takes nothing away from the delightful promise of the fourth petition, for this petition about daily bread is not Petition # 1, and there's a reason for that. This fourth petition follows three petitions that revolve around God's glory, God's kingdom, God's will – and the request for bread follows these three *because the bread we seek is directed to receiving what we need to glorify God better, make His kingdom come more, doing His will more accurately.* 1 Corinthians 10: “whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (vs 31). Food, clothes, a car, a house, toys big or small – all comes from God and is given for His glory. When we pray this fourth petition, then, we're implicitly asking God too for grace to *use the gifts He gives in a manner that praises Him.* What we receive isn't for ourselves, but is for Him, to hallow His name the more, to make His kingdom come the more, to do His will better still. And if He in wisdom then decides that we need less than we prefer, or need different things than we'd like, *who, O who, do we think we are that we'd dare to protest God's care, dare to complain that we don't get enough?* That's arrogance!! And it needs repentance.

Similarly, if God gives us more than we actually need –and that's true for every last one of us; none of us lives in a subsistence level– since God gives us more than we actually need, we all have the duty to share, generously, with others, near or far.

And you say: but we have to save up for tomorrow.... Indeed, brothers and sisters, act responsibly. *But do it in the firm conviction that tomorrow the Lord your God will supply tomorrow's needs.* Do your daily work, indeed; that's God's will for you. Don't do it because you have to eat next week or in 20 years' time when you're retired; that's the wrong motive for work, for your God has promised to supply – and so you trust Him and ask for your needs. But do your work as God gives it to you to do, and watch how the Lord will supply your daily needs.

It makes it all pretty plain, doesn't it. It's not about us. It's not about getting rich or comfortable. It's rather about service, to God and neighbour alike. And the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ gives daily bread so that we can serve God and neighbour. That mindset gives peace in our hearts....