The Prayer We Thought We Knew, Part 3:
"Give us this day our daily bread."

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October 4, 2026

Scripture: Matthew 6:7-15

When was the last time you had to ask someone for something you actually needed? Not a favor you could have done without — something you couldn't get for yourself.

Take a moment to consider this before we move on.

Biblical scholar Clifton Black observes that North American culture does not equip its members to confess inadequacy. We prefer to think of ourselves as self-sufficient, even self-made.

Which brings to mind Bart Simpson. When asked to say grace over a meal, he prayed:

"Dear God, we paid for all this stuff ourselves,
so thanks for nothing."[1]

This isn't just a joke about a cartoon character. It captures something about the culture we're immersed in when we open our mouths and pray:

"Give us this day our daily bread."

In its original context, Jesus was teaching people to pray who, unlike many of us, could not simply assume that they would eat tomorrow. In Jesus's world, the large majority lived at or near subsistence level. By one influential estimate, roughly two-thirds lived at or below subsistence, and as many as ninety percent lived close to it.

When I asked you to consider the last time you had to ask someone for something you actually needed, I'm guessing it took some thought to identify a time when you came up short and had to ask for help. For Jesus's audience, that was Tuesday.

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that in both gospels that contain the Lord's Prayer, Jesus addresses issues that reflect food insecurity in the surrounding teachings.

In Luke, the very next thing Jesus talks about is a man banging on his neighbor's door at midnight because a guest has arrived and he needs three loaves of bread. (Luke 11:5-8)

In Matthew, a few verses after the prayer – and immediately after warning against storing up treasures on earth and trying to serve both God and wealth – Jesus tells people not to worry about food and clothing.

[1] From *The Simpsons*, "Two Cars in Every Garage and Three Eyes on Every Fish" *(1990)*

Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. (Matt 6:25-26)

Jesus teaches people living so close to the edge to ask God for bread. Yet many of us say the same words while our refrigerators are full and our pantries are stocked. This raises an uncomfortable question: Are we praying the same prayer? Or have we quietly turned the prayer into something else?

When we filmed the Converging Paths episode that corresponds to this service, Rabbi Brian Mayer offered an observation that points toward how those of us who live above subsistence level might approach the prayer in our day. His observation wasn't about Hebrew, as you might expect, but Latin. He noted that our word "companion" is based on the Latin words *com* – "with" – and *panis* "bread." At its root, a companion is someone *you break bread with*.

When Jesus teaches us this prayer, note that he doesn't teach us, "Give ME this day MY daily bread," but "give US this day OUR daily bread."

In other words, his prayer isn't focused on "me or you," who may not worry so much about having enough food. It's not even about "we" who enjoy comparative abundance. It's about "us" – that is, those who have plenty and those who want.

Together.

What this says to me is that if I am to pray, "give us this day our daily bread," in the manner Jesus meant it to be prayed, I should not just be praying for myself, but for those for whom having enough food is an open question. And if, as we observed last week, we are meant to "put feet to prayer" – that is, act to bring about the outcomes we pray for, then my prayer is also a pledge. A pledge to give a hoot about the hungry – and do something about it.

Today being Tasajera Sunday and World Communion Sunday, a Latin American prayer comes to mind that relates to the Lord's Prayer:

O God, to those who have hunger give bread;
and to those who have bread give hunger for justice.

Can I hear an Amen? The hungry need bread, and those who have bread need hunger. Hunger for justice. Hunger for *com-panionship*. Hunger to move not just from "me" to "we," but from "we" to "us" – an "us" that includes those who hunger for bread.

I thank God that our faith community is a place where both those who hunger for bread and those who hunger for justice find a home. And I give thanks that so many in our church who hunger for justice have been instrumental in helping feed the hungry in the Eugene area.

Our "Little Pantry" outside the office is both stocked and visited all week long, year in, year out. A cadre of members have been making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches every Tuesday to feed the hungry for many years. We support the Interfaith Food Hub with dollars and donations of time, talent, and food items. And on any given Saturday, you are sure to find a number of our members feeding the unhoused at Washington Park through Neighbors Feeding

Neighbors – an organization started by one of our own members, Lisa Levsen. These are just a few of the ways our community has worked to address hunger.

I see our Tasajera mission as another way we "put feet" to the Lord's Prayer. While this mission isn't directly about feeding the hungry, the opportunities it creates can lead to something longer-lasting: education, livelihoods, and greater economic security that helps ensure that "daily bread," in fact, comes daily.

Each year we enable twenty or more youth to attend high school or college on the mainland. What they learn leads to livelihoods. They become "breadwinners." Many later return to Tasajera to encourage others to continue with their education, to be a part of their education itself, or to assist the residents in other ways.

Here are just a few examples of graduates we've helped who have now become "breadwinners."

Elsy Solano, a 2016 graduate, became a teacher, helping others to become "breadwinners" themselves. She spent her first six years after graduation teaching at a school on the Island of Tasajera. Later, she immigrated to the United States, where she now teaches children in Virginia.

Tania Cruz Gómez, a 2021 graduate, became a lawyer and has her own law office that provides services for a savings and loan cooperative in San Salvador.

Nohemy Cruz de Rojas and Meydi Funes, 2022 and 2023 graduates, both became nurses. Nohemy is now a university professor in San Salvador, preparing professionals for nursing careers. Meydi works as an emergency-care nurse on the Island of Tasajera.

René Sosa, a 2024 graduate, works as a sports rehabilitation technician for people with disabilities. He returns to the Island of Tasajera on weekends.

Finally, you may remember Jacqueline Valle, who spoke to us on Tasajera Sunday last year, as a 2025 graduate. She is now an English teacher at the European Academy of San Salvador and is continuing her English studies. She also got engaged and married this year!

Our Tasajera mission isn't simply about FCC helping poor Salvadorans become self-sufficient. Our *com-panions* in Tasajera help us recover something our abundance makes difficult to remember: that no one is self-made. Especially in a global economy, our health, wealth, and vitality depend on many others.

In fact, our daily bread is not entirely of our own making. Even those of us who enjoy baking bread don't necessarily grind the flour, or grow the wheat, harvest it, or transport it to market. In reality, dozens of human systems – and the coordinated labor of countless people we will never meet – must come together to produce a single loaf of bread. "Me" and "We" depend absolutely on "Us."

That means every time we pray *for our daily bread*, we confess something about who we are: dependent creatures in an interdependent world.

Last week, I challenged us all to pray the Lord's Prayer each day through the end of October, adding a single phrase, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth*, and in my life*, as it is in heaven." If you haven't started praying this way yet, or haven't done it consistently, there's still time! And today, our Tasajera Mission Team is offering us an opportunity to bring a little more heaven to earth, and a little more bread to our *com-panions* in Tasajera, by supporting this vital mission both prayerfully and financially. It is also inviting us to consider how interconnected and interdependent we are, not just locally or nationally, but across the world.

At the opening of this sermon, I invited you to remember the last time you needed something you couldn't provide for yourself. Perhaps one reason many of us found it difficult is that, like we saw with Bart Simpson, money hides the asking. Having money doesn't decrease our dependence on others. In fact, having money tends to dramatically increase our dependence on others. The difference between those with money and those without it is that those of us with money don't have to ask for what we need. We just pay for it.

Yet, each day, we need bread.

We need one another.

And we need release from the illusion that we are self-made.

One meaning of "us" is that affluent Christians should enlarge their circle of concern sufficiently to include those in greater need. A deeper meaning of "us" in the prayer is that there was never a "them" in the first place.

The hunger that unites us all is the hunger to live in a world in which "us" really means *us*.

And so, on this World Communion Sunday, we come to the Table together.

Give us this day *our* daily bread.

For an interfaith conversation on "Give us this day our daily bread," go to:
https://convergingpaths.transistor.fm/

Questions for individual contemplation and small group use:

1. Our Interdependence | Eric suggests that "money hides the asking"—that we remain deeply dependent on other people even when we can pay for what we need.

Where do you notice this hidden dependence in your own life? What changes when you think of yourself less as self-sufficient and more as part of an interdependent world?

2. Me => We => Us | The sermon says that praying "Give us this day our daily bread" can become both a prayer and a pledge.

What might it mean for you to "put feet" to this particular prayer? Where might you be invited to move from concern about "me" or "we" toward a larger "us"?

3. Is there a "them"? | Near the end of the sermon, Eric suggests that the deepest meaning of "us" may be "that there was never a 'them' in the first place."

What do you think that means? Who is hardest for you to include within that "us"?