

“You are what you eat”

The Third Sermon in a Lenten Series on the Lord's Prayer

First Presbyterian Church of Kingwood

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The season is Lent. And as we continue our series of sermons this Lent leading up to Easter, we are learning how to pray the Lord's Prayer. Jesus shared this prayer with his followers, we said, for that purpose; not just to teach them a prayer but to teach them how to pray. So the purpose of the Lord's Prayer is not just to give us words to repeat. The purpose of the Lord's Prayer is to give us words to eat.

We aren't supposed to just say the words and swallow them quickly. We're meant to chew on them. And as we do, we taste the truth; the truth that deepens our conversation with God and makes life not just something we live but something we savor, both now and forever.

Two weeks ago, we started chewing. We lifted the first line of the Lord's Prayer into our mouths for a week. We tasted the truth that God is our Father. Then last Sunday Chad put the second line of the Prayer up to our lips and invited us to sample it's bittersweet flavor. For praying for God's kingdom to come means always being willing to put our plans for ourselves in second place.

This week I hope you're ready for another piece of the Lord's Prayer. It's the bread course this week. Before we talk about it though let me tell you a story. A few weeks ago I was working. It was Saturday night, and I was finishing up a sermon in my study. Some of the rest of my family was in the living room and I heard my wife start up a movie. It took ten or twenty minutes but then I heard laughter, pretty loud laughter. So I walked out of my study and into the living room and asked what all the laughing was about.

"Sorry honey," my wife said. "We didn't mean to bother you. But when you've got a little more time in your life, you've got to watch this movie with me. It's really funny."

Well a little more time in my life came last night. All three of our kids were busy with friends, so Carolyn and I went to Blockbuster to rent a movie. And you know what you do when you go to Blockbuster, don't you? You take a lap! You take a lap around the wall of the store and try to find a movie you both want to watch.

Now of course as you do that you get involved in some pretty high level negotiations. I opened things up by suggesting we watch an action movie called "Surrogates." It stars Bruce Willis who's one of Carolyn's favorite actors, so I thought for a minute, I'd sealed the deal, until Carolyn said, "I like Bruce Willis and I'd watch that with you. But let's finish looking. If we don't find anything else, we'll come back."

I was disappointed when she said that, but not nearly as disappointed as I was a few minutes later when we came to a movie in the rack called, "Julie and Julia." "I'd love to watch this with you," Carolyn said. "This is the movie I was watching a few weeks ago when you walked in the living room and we were all laughing. I think you'd really like it."

I looked at the cover of the DVD. There were two women on it. Meryl Streep was one of them. Another actress named Amy Adams was the other. I looked back up from the cover of the DVD to my wife's face. She was grinning from ear to ear. I knew the negotiations were over.

We went to the counter at Blockbuster, rented the DVD, went home and turned it on. And I've got to be honest with you. Carolyn was right. I really liked the movie. If you haven't watched it yet, I won't spoil it for you. But I will tell you this. If you never liked Julia Child before, you might just find yourself feeling different about her after you watch "Julie and Julia." I did. It turns out for all her frumpiness she's also very funny.

I found myself so intrigued by her that I did some research yesterday and came up with some of Julia's best one liners. All of these are actual comments she made on television. Listen to some of them.

"The only time to eat diet food is while you're waiting for the steak to cook!" That about sums up my view of dieting. How about you?

"I enjoy cooking with wine," Julia said once, "sometimes I even put it in the food!" What an interesting thing to do.

"Always remember," she said, "if you're alone in the kitchen and you drop the lamb, you can just pick it up. Who's going to know?"

See what I mean? It turns out Julia had a sense of humor. Who knew? I didn't. But here's one last line from Julia Child. And I want us to think about it this morning as we think about the Lord's Prayer. "How can a nation be called great," she said, "if its bread tastes like Kleenex?"

So tell me, when you say the third line of the Lord's Prayer, how does it taste to you? Does it taste good? Is it good to say it when you pray it? Does it make you

smile the same way you do when you bite into a freshly baked baguette? Or is it kind of dull for you, as tasteless, Julia might say as a piece of Kleenex? Or maybe you've never lingered long enough over the words to notice how they taste, how they affect you, how it feels to pray "Give us this day our daily bread."

But chew on it for a minute this morning with me, will you? If you do, I suspect at first it may taste strange, especially the first word, the word "give." And the reason that word may taste strange is because bread isn't something we're used to receiving. It's something we're used to getting.

And because we're used to getting bread instead of receiving it we fall into something a friend of mine calls the "big things/little things" syndrome. That's when you believe it's alright to ask for God to give you "big things" but believe for the rest of life, for the "little things" we're on our own.

But what if ... what if God's desire is to help us discover a life where we're never really on our own? What if His wish is to be with us always; in the "little moments" of life as well as the big ones? What if our walk with God isn't meant to alternate between times when we ask for help because the situation's too big for us and times when things seem manageable and we think we can handle it by ourselves?

What if ... what if our whole life the "little moments" and the "big moments" are meant to be lived in conscious partnership with God, so that when we sit down at a table to eat, and look at the ordinary bread on the table ... what if in that moment we're meant to realize that bread is on the table not only because of us, but because God has been with us?

You see I believe that's exactly what Jesus is trying to help us experience. He is trying to help us experience a sense of God's presence and partnership in each of our lives on a daily basis. So he teaches us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." He teaches us to say it so that we can see it.

Because usually we don't. We don't see it. In fact, we don't even look for it! We think the bread on the table is a "little thing," something we put there. We never imagine God played a part in putting that bread there when the truth is He did.

The truth my friends is that if God is in our lives, He is in all of our lives. He is with us all the time. So the bread on our table is really there not only because of

our work, but because of God's work with us in our lives. And we need to see that. We need to see it. So Jesus gives us a prayer to help us recognize God at work in our lives on a daily basis. He teaches us to say it so we can see it.

Peyton Manning, as every New Orleans Saints fan knows was the losing quarterback in this year's Super Bowl. But he is also known throughout football for his ability to diagnose a defense. And in an article for an Indianapolis newspaper, he explains how he taught himself to do it.

He taught himself, he says, to talk his way through it. He tells himself to check one part of the defense, then another and another until he's consciously aware of the position of every defensive player on the field. In other words, he says it so he can see it. And because he does, he sees what others often miss.

Now we aren't all football players I know. But we all need to learn to see what we often miss. And Jesus is teaching us how to do it. We need to pray this piece of the Lord's prayer slowly and consciously think about what it's asking, not only what it's asking God to do, but what's it's asking us to do. It's asking us to learn how to recognize God's work in our lives on a daily basis. It's asking us to say it so we can see it.

But there's more; more that we need to chew on when we say this line in the Lord's Prayer this week and in the weeks to come. And it has to do with the word "daily." "Give us," we pray "our daily bread." It turns out the English word "daily" is really a translation of a Greek word that's used in the Bible only in the Lord's Prayer. According to the best lexicon we've got it's probably a word with a double meaning. It means both "bread for the day," and "enough for tomorrow." You see the custom in those days was to mix unleavened ingredients with leavened dough and let it rise overnight so that it became bread for the day on the next day.

Because of this the word Jesus teaches his disciples to pray in the Lord's prayer seems to be used to bear both meanings. It is bread for today. But it is also bread for tomorrow. And maybe that's why in John 6 Jesus says "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry ... For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him will have eternal life ..."

In other words everyone who prays for daily bread in the Lord's prayer isn't praying only to recognize God's partnership in providing bread for them today.

They are also putting their trust in God's power to provide them with bread for the future, the bread they will need when they pass from today into tomorrow.

In a book written in 1988 a psychiatrist named Charles Allen told this story. I've never forgotten it. After World War II the allied armies gathered up many hungry, homeless children and placed them in large camps. There the children were fed and cared for but at night they didn't sleep well. They were restless and afraid.

Finally, a psychologist hit on a solution. After the children were put to bed, they each received a slice of bread to hold. If they wanted more to eat, more was provided, but this particular slice was not to be eaten. It was just to hold. Holding on to that bread slice had amazing results. Each child who held a slice of bread would go to sleep knowing they would have something to eat tomorrow. That knowledge gave them a sense of confidence and peace.

And we are meant my friends to have that same sense of confidence and peace. For we have been given bread to hold on to, bread that will endure through the night into tomorrow. Jesus Christ is the bread of life and everyone who feeds on him at his table will greet him in eternal life.

So as you pray the third line of the Lord's Prayer this week. And I hope you will pray that line, just that one line every day until we meet again next Sunday. As you say it slowly, remember what it really means. Remember to say it so you can see it. And remember that beyond where you and I can see today the truth of the third line of the Lord's Prayer will still last. God will give us our daily bread not only today but tomorrow too. So pray the prayer this week. Listen to what you're praying. Realize that in Christ we are what we eat. And as Julia would say, "Bon Appétit!"

Let's pray ...