

**Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
September 27 & 28, 2014
Debbie Manning
This Day: Be Present
Matthew 6:11**

Well, good morning, everyone. I'm Debbie Manning and I'm part of the pastoral care team here at CPC. We're in the third week of a series on prayer, in particular, the Lord's Prayer. It's the very prayer Jesus says as He instructs His disciples on how we should pray. Let's pray that prayer together.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name, Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

I can't think of the word *prayer* without thinking about one of my most embarrassing moments. Seven or eight years ago Rich Phenow asked me to help him with one of the mid-month chapel services. I hadn't had a lot of experience up front. There were about 45 people sitting in the chapel and when I got up and said, "Please join me in the Lord's Prayer," for the life of me, I couldn't remember how it started. I am 54 years old and I have said that prayer, I don't know how many times. I stood up there and could feel the red, creeping up my neck. I was thinking, *my Father?* No that's not right. *Thy Father?* No, no. I saw Rich looking at me with these eyes like, "What are you doing?" It was the Holy Spirit maybe, but it finally came to me. *Our Father.*

Well, here we are in the Lord's Prayer. Two weeks ago John Crosby started us out with "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name" and last week he dug into "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Today we're looking at "Give us this day our daily bread." Seven little words with a whole lot of meaning. Foundational, I think, for who we are and how we are to live. I think *daily bread* leads us to the one thing we are just so hungry for, that we desire, and that is the full life. The craving for life includes the desire to feel loved and happy, but bigger than that is the need to experience worth and significance. We want to feel like we matter. We can have all the comforts in the world and still feel empty because only our Creator can give us the fullness of life that we crave. We know in our heads that Jesus' death on the cross is proof that we have worth and significance to God, but I think we struggle with bringing that truth from our head to our hearts.

It's the full life, one filled with grace and joy that we're after. To fully live the life God created for us is to live a life of thanksgiving, and the Lord's Prayer helps us get there. When we pray "Give us this day our daily bread," we acknowledge that God is our provider and sustainer, that Jesus is our daily bread. In the daily bread part, the *daily* is key because it's not a one-time deal. It's recognizing Jesus in the day-to-day that leads to a life of gratitude. It's kind of a thanksgiving. It transcends our circumstances and points to Jesus. And while I think that sounds great, wouldn't

it be nice if there were just three easy steps to the full life. But it's not quite that simple. The commitment to knowing Jesus as our Lord and Savior, the commitment to being present daily, hourly, in the moment-to-moment with God and one another, this lifestyle of thanksgiving, they all work together. They point us to this full life that I think God has intended for us. It's easy to say but it's hard to do. What does it mean to embrace this kind of life, this kind of living, with the ups and downs, the day-to-day, the joys, the sorrows, on the big and little things in life?

I think we've all experienced how wonderful and hard and busy and messy life can be. One of my favorite movies is an oldie, *Parenthood*, with Steve Martin. I think it exemplifies this because we see Steve Martin, the father, who just wants a quiet, peaceful, normal life but his life is anything but that. It's crazy and busy and messy with out-of-control kids and problems at work. When we pick this up, he's trying to get a little empathy and compassion from his wife and then Grandma enters. Let's take a look.

[Video begins.]

[Mary Steenburgen as Karen Buckman, the mother:] Life is messy.

[Steve Martin as Gil Buckman, the father:] Ish! I hate messy. It's so messy.

[Helen Shaw as Grandma:] You know, when I was 19, Grandpa took me on a roller coaster.

[Father:] So?

[Grandma:] Up. Down. Up. Down. Oh, what a ride!

[Father:] What a great story!

[Grandma:] Um-hum. I always wanted to go again. You know, it was just interesting to me that a ride could make me so frightened, so scared, so sick, so excited, and so thrilled, altogether. Some didn't like it. They went on the merry-go-round. That just goes around. Nothing. I liked the roller coaster! You get more out of it. Um-hum. Well, I'll be seeing you in the car.

[Mother:] She's a very smart lady. C'mon, Taylor [speaking to their daughter].

[Father:] Yeah, a minute ago I was really confused about life and then Grandma came in with a wonderful, little, sexy roller-coaster story and now everything is great again!

[Mother:] I happen to like the roller coaster, okay? As far as I'm concerned, your grandmother is brilliant. Come on, Taylor. Come on, hurry up.

[Father:] Yeah, if she's so brilliant, how come she's sitting in our neighbor's car?

[Video ends.]

I know it's old, but I just love this movie. Well, here's the problem. They are having trouble finding faithfulness in the midst of all of this life. I love Grandma's message that we can choose

the merry-go-round. It's safe and we don't have to be fully awake to ride on it but the roller coaster with all its ups and downs is the full life that we are called for. We can only enter the full life when our faith gives us a life of thanks. At the end of Paul's 1st Letter to the Thessalonians, he gives a series of brief and important commands.

16 Rejoice always, **17** pray continually, **18** give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus [Thessalonians 5:16-18].

Paul is writing this letter to encourage this young church and his message is that to live fully, we are to live gratefully. Paul gives these commands the highest possible authority by saying, "This is God's will for our lives." I feel like I could really get my arms around that if Paul was saying, "Rejoice sometimes, pray occasionally, give thanks when you feel like it" but I think what challenges us are the words *always*, *continually*, and *in all circumstances*. How do we get there? How do we learn to be thankful in all things, to have gratitude in the midst of busy lives and brokenness, debt and divorce, illness, and even death because that's the reality of our lives?

Let's look at Jesus' instructions in prayer, His fourth petition, "Give us this day our daily bread." The bread signifies all the things that we need, body and soul, everything necessary to sustain life. There's a gratitude that comes from this understanding. It isn't through the bread provided *per se*, although I'm sure we're grateful for that, for all the things and experiences that allow us to experience God. The gratitude here is for the provider for the bread of life, not for the provided. When we can understand the true bread of life and live our lives out in daily and constant communion with God and others, it leads us to a life of thanks in all things.

Open your Bibles and join me or read after me from the slide behind me. We are going to be looking at John 6:26-35. Chapter 6 opens with Jesus feeding the 5,000. What is important to our story, the context of what we will be talking about today, is that the feeding of the multitudes is another sign pointing to Jesus, the belated Messiah. The sign shows that Jesus fulfilled symbolism related to God's provision of manna to Israel in the wilderness through Moses. It points back to the Exodus story and His audience would have been really familiar with that. Now Jesus has this crowd who has been following Him all over the countryside. The crowd goes back to where He had fed them the day before but He and His disciples are gone, so they hopped into the boats, went across the lake, and found Jesus and His disciples. They asked, "Rabbi, when did you get here?"

26 Jesus replied to them, "I can guarantee this truth: You're not looking for me because you saw miracles. You are looking for me because you ate as much of those loaves as you wanted. **27** Don't work for food that spoils. Instead, work for the food that lasts into eternal life. This is the food the Son of Man will give you. After all, the Father has placed his seal of approval on him." **28** The people asked Jesus, "What does God want us to do?" **29** Jesus replied to them, "God wants to do something for you so that you believe in the one whom he has sent." **30** The people asked him, "What miracle are you going to perform so that we can see it and believe in you? What are you going to do?" **31** Our ancestors ate the manna in the desert. Scripture says, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" **32** Jesus said to them, "I can guarantee this truth: Moses didn't give you bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. **33** God's bread is the man who comes from heaven and gives life to the world." **34** They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread all the time." **35** Jesus told them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never become hungry, and whoever believes in me will never become thirsty.

The bread and the fish that Jesus fed the crowds wasn't the true gift. It was a way to lead the people to the gift giver, the provider, the Messiah. People were seeking Jesus only for the material and the physical benefit that He gave, but missed the miraculous signs that were pointing to Him, pointing to His Divine Nature as God. The crowd said, "Give us that bread every day" and Jesus' response was, "I am that bread." In our busy, broken, and messy lives, I think we forget that. We miss the message. The question is, do we recognize who Jesus really is? Who do we believe Jesus to be? We can continue to be fed with bread and fish, but until we know our provider, our God, that deep hunger inside of each of us will never be satisfied. In the passage we just read, Jesus is really clear. Believe in the one He sent. The true bread of heaven is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. "I am the bread of life. Whoever believes in me will never be hungry or thirsty." Are we stopping long enough to see and experience our daily bread?

From his book *Present Perfect: Finding God in the Now*, Greg Boyd said that what we believe is essential, but the important question is what we decide to do, moment-by-moment on the basis of what we believe. Sometimes I think we make Jesus the Lord of our lives in theory but we don't make Him Lord over every moment, over the moments that make up our lives. We live in a culture that wrestles with being present in the moment, present to God, present to one another. We are always looking for the next thing: getting the to-do lists done, wanting more than we have, making sure we are connected, connected so much that we never are never really present.

It makes me think a bit about technology, and I'm not throwing technology under the bus because my husband has been in technology his whole career, but I do think about things like cell phones and texting and Instagram and Facebook. In theory I think these are amazing ways we can connect with one another. The ability to connect though can slip into this need to be connected at all times. I think it can create a panic of making sure that we never miss anything when, in fact, we miss the main thing, seeing God in the moment. Somehow we tie together our worth and value into the things that are of the world instead of the things that matter—God and the full life. For me, these things are anxiety producing, empty, lonely, tiring. Most of us are guilty of being distracted in the present moment by being too busy, by being overly connected. I know I am, and when we do that, we are missing God. We miss the present gift of where we are right now and who we are with.

A few weeks ago I was reminded of this when I had a chance to go out to Big Sky, Montana with my small group. Over a four-day weekend, we sat at the base of the mountains together. No cell phones. No TV. No computers. We weren't connected, but we were probably the most connected than we have been in a long time. During those days in the mountains, we experienced God and one another in our conversations, in our laughter, and in our tears. I have to tell you, it was life-giving.

That is not always the reality of my days. I'm sure you've experienced it, too, sitting at a dinner table or a meeting with friends and family engaged in what I think is a deep and meaningful conversation. And I notice someone checking a text, sending a text, even posting on Facebook and missing this moment. The reality and truth that we don't always like to acknowledge is, that's all we've got. This moment on earth is what we've got.

Working in pastoral care, we have somewhat of an awareness of that. Just two nights ago, on a Friday night, I sat with a member of this community. She lay in her hospital bed in her living room in hospice, dying of cancer. Her 35-year-old son snuggled up to her and her husband and I sat at her feet and we told stories and we laughed and we cried. We were in that moment because we knew that moment was all we had.

Greg Boyd goes on to say,

. . . the single most important aspect of reality is that God is present in it every moment. To forget that God is present in any given moment is to forget the most important aspect of that moment. God is the God of the living. . . . He is the great "I AM," not the great "I was" or the great "I will be."

Remaining aware of God's presence is the single most important task in the life of every follower of Jesus. "Oh, there's so much to get done." It's hard work to be present in the moment. It takes effort and discipline, commitment. It takes slowing down. Here's what Jesus says. "Spend your energy seeking the eternal life that the Son of Man can give you." We do that by being present in the moment because if we don't, we lose the moment. We have to let go of the world as our source of life if we are going to offer ourselves up to God moment by moment.

Practicing the presence of God is to realize life while we live it in every, every minute so we can share every day in all things and be in communion with the Bread of Life. We pray and we give thanks and these things work together like an upward spiral. If we stay the course with the help of the Holy Spirit, we change. We see God in all things. That's why Jesus calls us to a life of prayer. It's transformative. Our challenge is to live a life of thanksgiving, to be in the present moment, to embrace the full life.

I'm going to challenge you and me. Take that prayer journal you were given and carry it with you every single day. Write down the things in the daily moments you are grateful for. Beautiful big things like sunsets. Ordinary things like getting dinner on the table. A hug or a kind word from someone. Thanks for a friend, for a birthday like Dan Anderson's.

Then the second thing: At the end of the day, write down times that you have been aware of God's presence. I believe you will see it because you are looking for it. Carry this little prayer journal with you for one week and let's see what happens. Let's see if we are living a life where we are fully awake, fully alive, because that's what God wants for us. That leads us to a life of thanks.

Back to the movie, *Parenthood*. Spoiler alert. The beauty of the ending. The dad finally gets it. We catch up with him now at their daughter's school play.

[Video snippet.]

The roller coaster is the full life and we can choose to be on it, giving thanks for all the ups and downs because we know it is the best life. God is in the seat next to us. Let's pray.

Holy God, we thank You that You are the Bread of Life and that You call us to the full life, a life of thanksgiving. Help us, God, to be people who can bring that truth from our heads to our hearts. Help us to live that out in our daily lives. Thank You for being a God who loves us so much that You gave Your life for us. In Your precious and holy Name. Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.