

“Catching Up with Yesterday”

The Lord’s Prayer

Matthew 6:24-34

Matthew 6:11

August 3, 2008

“Give us today the food we need.” (6:11)

The “ancient people” were acutely aware that their very existence every day depended on God, and on the orderly nature of the world God created. Modern people, 76% of Hoosiers a recent study shows, believe God exists at least as a mental concept. The people of ancient times took it way beyond what we are ready to go. We are so far behind in our understanding of God that we have to hurry to catch up with yesterday.

** ** *

A Russian scientist and a Czechoslovakian scientist had spent their lives studying the grizzly bear. Each year they would petition their respective governments for the funds that would allow them to go to Yellowstone Park to study these remarkable creatures. Finally, after years of sending in requests for funding, they received the money they needed.

The two scientists traveled to America and reported to a ranger station in Yellowstone. They explained why they had come to the park, but the rangers said that it was mating season for the grizzlies. It was far too dangerous to let these two scientists go out in the field and get close to the animals. The Russian and the Czech begged to be allowed out into the park. This was, they said, the only time they would ever have the chance to study the grizzlies in person.

Finally the rangers relented and gave the two men cell phones. They told them to report in every day. For several days they called in to the ranger station, and then nothing was heard from them. The rangers formed a search party and found the scientists’ camp completely torn up. There was no sign of the missing men.

The rangers followed the trail of a male bear and a female bear. They found the female and decided to kill her to find out if she had eaten one of the two visitors. The American park rangers feared an international incident if they could not explain what had happened to the two scientists.

So they killed the female, opened her stomach, and found the remains of what was determined to be the Russian. One ranger turned to the other and said, “You know what this means, don’t you?” “Of course,” said the second ranger. “The Czech’s in the male.”

Do you expect God to put bread on your table today? Those ancient people, who wrote some of the early expressions of our faith community, had a literal belief that their daily existence depended on God. They believed in what we today call a 3-story universe. If it weren’t for God, the order that held out the primeval waters would cease, the water would come rushing in, and their life would be over.

We know our physical world better than that. We have sent people into space. The current science lab floats around about 225 miles above the earth. We have sent rockets thousands and thousands of miles out into space. We know there is nothing we are going to punch a hole in above us. We know that this planet we call home is round. We don't live on a shelf, in danger of floating out too far on the water and falling off the edge. Thus, we are left with the problem of connecting the ancient world of faith, with the real world in which we live. We have not done a very good job of learning how to update our concepts, and our thinking. In reality, the world of faith, the world of understanding God, and integrating God into our lives, is a world left vague and unfamiliar. We need to find a way to catch up with yesterday.

I find that even people with no religious affiliation, with no religious training, still think in concepts thousands of years outdated. People still talk of going to heaven when they die as if it is a particular place. We still use a concept of "streets of gold, and gates of pearl." We still think of heaven as "going up" and hell as "going down." Yet we know our world rotates, and travels through space.

How do we regain that sense of daily dependence on God that the ancients had, and translate that faith into our modern ways of thinking?

Jesus told the disciples to ask God to give us our daily bread. The question begs to be asked – **Do we feel that we depend on God for our daily existence?**

Why do we need to ask God for our daily bread, when we know that we have food to eat each day due to the fact that we go to work, and earn a living, and buy the food we need?

We begin with a statement of faith that we are nothing without God. We stated last week that God is the creator and the sustainer. It is our faith statement, that no matter what science discovers about HOW the world came into being, it is God that is behind it. The master mind and laboring hand behind it all. Secondly, then, we attest that God SUSTAINS everything. God is the order behind everything. It is God's laws that hold it all together, that make this an ordered universe.

For example, it may be that the universe came together by combinations of tiny cells and life forms. We know that laws of math and gravity that God created make it possible to send a rocket outward in a manner that is accurate and dependable.

We are nothing without God. The ultimate sin, the ultimate rejection of God, is to live our lives as if we have no need of God. To allow ourselves to slip into thinking that we are totally self-sufficient, able to take care of ourselves and decide our own destiny is foolishness in the extreme.

Sadly we sometimes only turn to God when tragedy comes, when things seem beyond our control. Then we remember reality. When life turns sour and seems out of control, then we run to God for help. Or maybe worse yet turn into accusers of God – asking where He is and why He doesn't do something and why He allows things to happen the way they do.

Or when we come to the end of life in this world and are confronted with our own mortality, then we remember the God who made us. It is He that made us and not we ourselves. We are His people, the sheep of His pasture.

To recognize our utter dependence on God each day:

1. reduces our anxiety. Not everything depends on me. Live life one day at a time. Ask for God's sustenance for this day. Daily faith in God forbids anxious worry which is so characteristic of the life which has not learned to trust.

2. improves our attitude. Opens us up to thanksgiving. There is no thanksgiving when you earn it and deserve it all.

There is no sharing when you think it is all the work of your own hand. I've made it myself, now let everyone else work hard like me and make it on their own. But that attitude doesn't explain so many things. There are (if you will forgive this way of expressing it) rotten, miserable people who seem to have everything. And there are (if you will forgive this way of expressing it) kind and wonderful people who seem to have nothing. The Biblical faith is that "everything we have comes from you." Do you believe it?

3. opens doors to God Himself. Now you are acknowledging Him in your life. Prayer and hard work go hand in hand. "You should have seen this garden when God had it by Himself."

There are 2 basic truths here. Without God we can do nothing, and without our effort and cooperation God can do nothing for us.

God gives the vision, it's up to us to do something with it.

DAILY bread. Not bread for tomorrow, or next week. The bread we need for today. Not more than we need. But I have to make sure there is enough for the future, we protest. Why do you worry about tomorrow? Look at the birds – doesn't God take care of them and give them everything they need?

Here is the place to assert the obvious that is in the larger reading for the day. "Give us today the food we need." - which is? What IS the food we need? Because in 6:25 He says "don't worry about the food and drink you need to stay alive."

HE is our daily need. The life giving force we need every day.

Is there a connection to that pathetic joke I told at the start? You bet there is! We think our destiny is in our own hands. We think we have to control everything. We think we have everything in control. We think it all depends on us.

We think if we stand in that long line at the market buying up tickets for the \$100 million in the lottery we will have a great life if we get the winning ticket. We think we have to walk up to the dangerous bears of life and take them on, no matter how dangerous they may be. We are wrong. We will get eaten by the bears.

We miss, at our own peril, the reality that our real life is NOT in getting and having and possessing and controlling. In reality we get and have and possess and control nothing. God is in control. What we need desperately is to catch up with yesterday's understanding that our lives depend on God. Only by coming to that faith can we give up our petty lives of nervous anxiety over what will become of us tomorrow. When we discover that God will take care of us and our tomorrows, then we can begin to really live today!!!