

Ask for the three loaves of bread

Luke 12:22-31

Luke 6:9-11

Today's sermon is the fourth in a series of sermons on the Lord's Prayer, continued from the last three Sundays. Today's topic is "Ask for the three loaves of bread." Many of you may guess that there is bread for the body and bread for the soul, but ask, "What is the third kind of bread?" Yes, there are three kinds of nourishment needed for us to live a meaningful and happy life. The three loaves are not just for breakfast, lunch and dinner. The Lord Jesus taught us to pray and ask for our needs, "Give us today our daily bread." Yet we also know that human beings cannot live on bread alone. In the Lord's Prayer, "bread" means not only the bread that we eat but also includes our other daily needs for physical life.

Once, in a small town, a new Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurant opened up across the street from a Catholic Church. The manager had big ambitions to build up his KFC business. He mailed coupons and a grand opening ad to every household in town. Still, not many people visited his restaurant. One Sunday morning, the manager saw a large group of people coming out of the Catholic Church. He wished he could have that many customers. And he nodded and smiled to himself because he had a bright idea.

The manager visited the Catholic Church and asked the secretary to speak with the priest. He introduced himself as the manager of the new KFC. He said, "Father, I am a Catholic and I wish the church to grow. I would like to donate one million dollars to the church, but I have one suggestion. I know that the people pray the Lord's Prayer every day. Can you change just one word in the Lord's Prayer? Can you say: 'Give us our daily chicken' rather than 'daily bread?' We don't eat only bread during the day. We eat more meat than bread. So I don't think it would matter if we changed one word, from 'bread' to 'chicken.' Besides, chicken is a healthy white meat recommended by doctors."

The Father nodded his head and said, "I agree with you. Changing one word from bread to chicken doesn't matter to me. But I cannot decide by myself. I should ask my bishop." So the Father and the manager visited the bishop and told him about the manager's wish to donate one million dollars, and his suggestion to change one word, from bread to chicken.

When the bishop heard the story he also nodded his head and said, "I agree with you. Changing one word from bread to chicken doesn't matter to me. But I should ask my archbishop. So the Bishop, the Father and the manager visited the archbishop and told him about the manager's donation, and his suggestion to change the word "bread" to "chicken."

When the archbishop heard this story he smiled and pushed a buzzer on his desk and called his secretary. When the secretary appeared, he asked, "When will we finish the contract between the church and the bakery?" This is a joke, of course.

When Christianity first came to Korea nobody knew what bread was, what it looked like, or what it tasted like. Koreans eat rice at every meal. So in the Korean Bible, “daily bread” was translated into “daily food.” So “bread” won’t need to be changed to “chicken” in the Korean bible!

Jesus instructs us to ask the Father for each day’s provision, “Give us today our daily bread.” Why only our daily bread? Why not a month of groceries? And is food the only provision we should ask for? What other daily necessities might we ask the Father to give us? Most of the time, we don’t think much about daily bread. In fact, we’re trying to eat less, not more. But when our jobs are cut, or when our retirement savings are wiped out, or other demands stretch our financial resources, it’s easy to worry. We know that God provides. We’re just afraid that he won’t be there for the crisis we are facing right now.

Human beings cannot live only on bread. Human beings are social beings and spiritual beings as well. We need three kinds of food for life: bread for physical needs, commendation from others for social food, and the Grace of God for our spiritual life. In these perspectives I would like to share the message of the scripture readings.

We need three loaves of bread for living, and the first is the bread to eat.

Food gives us a feeling of satisfaction, especially when we are tired or hungry. It makes us happy and content. Food, or bread, is a basic need for living. Without food human beings cannot survive. There are still many people in the world who are dying of hunger, who don’t have bread to eat. Asking for bread from God is not shameful. It is an urgent request. The Lord doesn’t ignore requests for life’s necessities. Rather, He encourages us to ask Him, as a son would ask for bread from his father.

Bread for the body is a basic need for everyone. Every living creature needs food to survive. Most animals are constantly searching for food. But human beings acquire food through their work. Acquiring food is the basic activity of life. We are sometimes confused, and ask ourselves, “Do we eat to live, or do we live to eat?” Eating good food is one of life’s most important, and most enjoyable, activities. Imagine a future where eating was no longer necessary. How dull would our lives be? Bread for the body needs to be supplied every day. If people didn’t need to eat every day, then we probably wouldn’t work every day. And if we didn’t work, people would probably wander here and there, without purpose for our lives.

We eat three meals a day. God designed the human body so that it needs food three times a day. What we eat is not important. But how we eat gives our life meaning. Working and eating are closely related in our lives. Sometimes work gives us more satisfaction than food. Sometimes when we are concentrating on our work, we forget to eat. Meaningful work can be food for our lives as well.

Jesus met a Samaritan woman, and found her running and exclaiming, “I found the Messiah!” He was full with satisfaction. At that moment his disciples urged him, “Rabbi, eat something,” But he said to them, “I have food that you don’t know.” “My food is to

do the will of Him who sent me and to finish His work.” (John 4: 34) How we eat is tastier than what we eat. Work and eat, and you will be satisfied.

Second, we need bread to share with others.

Human beings are social beings. We gain joy and pleasure through meaningful relationships with others. Across all cultures, when people gather to celebrate, there is sure to be a lot of good food. Food is a basic need for all. Where food is shared, there is also peace.

The Lord taught us to pray, “Give us today our daily bread.” He doesn’t tell us to pray for my bread, but for our bread. “Our daily bread” means bread to share. When we read the scripture in Acts Chapter 2, we read about an unusual happening among the early Christians in the church. They lived and worked together joyfully. And they also ate together:

“All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:43-47)

Where food is shared, there is real peace.

Lastly, we need bread to lift up.

When I was first appointed to a church in Korea, it was in the deep countryside. Most of the members were very poor farmers. Their lots were small and their work was hard. Their incomes were barely enough to cover their needs. The church offered me a one-and-a-half-room house to live in and about one hundred twenty dollars as cash salary. And one more thing that the women’s group offered us was thirty pounds of rice a month for our family. Their offer of rice was interesting, and quite meaningful.

Each family participated voluntarily in rice-raising for the pastor. Each morning, the woman of the house would save one spoonful of rice per person in her family, and put it into a small bag. If there were four members in the household, she would save four spoonfuls of rice each day. And when she came to church on Sunday, she would bring the rice she saved from the week as an offering to God. The rice offering that the woman brought to church was used for the pastor’s family. Some of the rice was white, some of it was brown, and some of it was mixed with other grains. Thirty pounds of rice was not enough for us when we had visitors or guests.

One family who lived close to the parsonage was very poor. The family ate barley, instead of rice, because rice was too expensive. They couldn’t even think of buying white rice. Barley is very difficult to chew, while white rice is soft. I wanted to share our rice with the family, but the women’s group objected. So Sun and I decided to share our meals with the family. I asked them to bring their barley, and I mixed their barley with

our rice. And we put their simple side dishes along with our food on a common table, and shared our meals with them once a week. It was a kind of communion for us.

We have often heard, “There is bread for the soul, and bread for the body.” But what is bread for soul? The Lord Jesus said, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry.” What is this spiritual bread? You might answer: “It’s Christ, right? Or the Word of God?”

I think that bread for the soul is our daily bread, spiritualized. We need to spiritualize our daily bread. How do we spiritualize bread? The bread that I eat is the bread for my body. But the same bread broken to share with others is loving bread. And the same bread sanctified in memory of Christ during communion is the body of Christ, spiritual bread. That is how we spiritualize bread. The bread to offer to God is sanctified bread. “This is the body of Christ broken for you.”

God told His people to sanctify their grains. “When someone brings a grain offering to the Lord, his offering is to be of fine flour. He is to pour oil on it, put incense on it and take it to Aaron’s sons the priests. The priest shall take a handful of the fine flour and oil, together with all the incense, and burn this as a memorial portion on the altar, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the Lord. The rest of the grain offering belongs to Aaron and his sons; it is a most holy part of the offerings made to the Lord by fire.” (Leviticus 2:1-3)

When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to his disciples, “Give them something to eat.” Andrew, Peter’s brother, brought some loaves of bread and fishes that a boy brought to him. “Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?” Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. Bread to lift up is the bread for our soul.

Many people are starving and dying. Some are hungry for food for the body. Some are hungry for food for the soul. Their souls are starving.

What kind of bread are you looking for? Bread to eat? Bread to share? Or Bread to lift up? Where is your sanctuary in daily living? Do you have something to lift up for God? Those who have bread to lift up are blessed since they live in sanctuary.