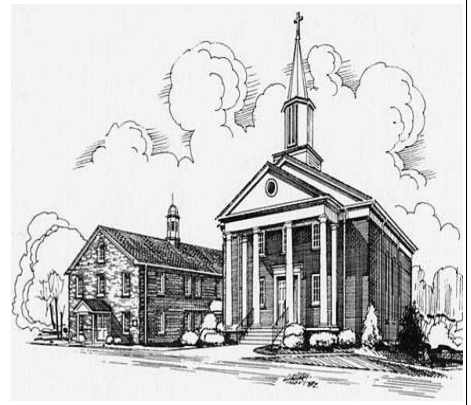


# The Lessons Appointed for Use on the

Sunday closest to July 27

Proper 12

Year C RCL



Colossians 2:6-15

Psalm 138

Luke 11:1-13

## The Collect

O God, the protector of all who trust in you, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy: Increase and multiply upon us your mercy; that, with you as our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we lose not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## The Response

Psalm 138

### ***Confitebor tibi***

1 I will give thanks to you, O LORD, with my whole heart; \*

before the gods I will sing your praise.

2 I will bow down toward your holy temple and praise your Name, \*

because of your love and faithfulness;

3 For you have glorified your Name \*

and your word above all things.

4 When I called, you answered me; \*

you increased my strength within me.

5 All the kings of the earth will praise you, O LORD, \*

when they have heard the words of your mouth.

6 They will sing of the ways of the LORD, \*

that great is the glory of the LORD.

7 Though the LORD be high, he cares for the lowly; \*

he perceives the haughty from afar.

8 Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you keep me safe; \*

you stretch forth your hand against the fury of my enemies; your right hand shall save me.

9 The LORD will make good his purpose for me; \*

O LORD, your love endures for ever; do not abandon

the works of your hands.

**Colossians 2:6-15**

AS you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority. In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it.

Luke 11:1-13

Jesus was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” He said to them, “When you pray, say:

**Father, hallowed be your name.**

**Your kingdom come.**

**Give us each day our daily bread.**

**And forgive us our sins,**

**for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.**

**And do not bring us to the time of trial.”**

And he said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.’ And he answers from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with

me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.’ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

“So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

## SERMON

I thought we might look more closely at one petition in the Lord's prayer today because a great mystery resides in “give us this day our daily bread”. Our daily bread is more than a loaf of Kroger bread. It's a mystery meal.

Our passage today from Luke offers one version of the Lord's prayer. The other one, the more familiar one, is in Matthew. Surprisingly, buried in both is the same Greek word, *epiousios*. It is translated as “daily”, but here's the mystery: epiousios appears nowhere else in the Bible, nor anywhere else in any ancient Greek text, save in a single papyrus!

Think about that! Greek is a subtle and supple language, but this word appears nowhere in the Bible except in these two Gospels, written by two different communities, recounting a prayer offered by Jesus, who



was speaking in Aramaic or Hebrew, not Greek. Add to that the observation that Greek has a perfectly adequate word, *hemeran*, to express the idea of “daily”, and you begin to see what a mystery is hidden in the prayer we recite every Sunday.

Those scholars who actually know Greek (as opposed to your fraud of a pastor) have spent an enormous amount of time and effort trying to dig out what Matthew and Luke are saying. I won’t list their efforts, because I’m hoping you can stay awake until the second page of this sermon, but there is one explanation that appeals to me today and it comes from Kenneth E. Bailey, an Episcopal professor of theology and linguistics. He proposed “give us today the bread that doesn't run out” as the correct translation.<sup>1</sup>

Not just enough bread for a sandwich today, but a

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey (20 August 2009). *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels*. InterVarsity Press. pp. 120–. ISBN 978-0-8308-7585-6. Quoted in Wikipedia article on epiousios.

mysterious food that is lasting or perpetual and provided by God to His children. Lasting or perpetual bread that doesn't run out is certainly the stuff of a mystery meal. There is something, a gift from God, which sustains us, day after day, in the work to which God has called us. For this Jesus taught His disciples to pray, but what hunger could this mystery meal satisfy?

To answer that, we have to get a little philosophical. We have to talk about grand narratives and our tribal allegiance. Yes, I said tribal. We are tribal creatures and tribal creatures value highly the sacred things of their tribes, their shibboleths.

Confession time! How many will confess to going on autopilot sometimes during the Lord's prayer? Don't be ashamed. We all do it. Reciting the Lord's prayer, whether we're paying attention or not, is part of our shared narrative – the things we do which knit us to-

gether as a tribe. That doesn't make it right, of course, but we have to face up to our shortcomings, and this is one of them – we are very concerned with being reassured of our place in our tribe, sometimes to our great peril, and very inclined to make idols of the customs, principles, and beliefs – the grand narrative – of our tribe.

Grand narratives are the assumptions we make about how the world is, assumptions that we don't really think about most of the time, but which inform and form the ways we live within the world. I'd like to talk about three and the openness of each to the nourishment of the mystery meal.

The first narrative is that of the cranky old man tribe. This narrative informs us that the world is a totally messed up place in which to live, and that the best you can do is to be resigned to it by carving out a little

comfortable space and living only there. The world and the people in it are so awful that there is no reason to try to make it better, and you couldn't do it even if you tried, so it is better to find a comfortable chair and shout at the kids to get off your lawn. People within such a narrative can't be fed. Their digestion is soured.

The second narrative speaks of a rational world – the world of science in which everything can be explained, provided you have enough mathematics, and, consequently, the world is just what the mathematics says that it is. There is much to be learned from such a narrative, but, at bottom, it is circular reasoning. There is no God because God can't be explained, and nothing can exist other than that which can be explained. People within this narrative can't be fed for their pride has already filled them.

The third narrative sees the world as transcendent –

a world with aspects not directly observable. The world in which we live is greater than the portions we can describe. This, of course, is the narrative to which people of faith, and I might add not just Christians, ascribe. It is the narrative of the humble tribe, the ones who might actually pray, and be fed.

How would the followers of each of these narratives answer the mystery of *epiousious*? The sour old man would say that Jesus was praying for food for the day, but probably add that he worked for his bread, and the problem with the world is the fault of the awful people who think they're entitled to a sandwich just because they prayed for one.

The rationalist would agree that Jesus was praying for enough resources to get Him through the day, and would probably add that he'd be more successful at that if he stopped believing in magic and got himself a job.

What does the person of faith understand about Jesus' prayer? If Jesus just wanted a bread delivery, why did both Luke and Matthew use a word so rare that it appears nowhere else? This is the place where those of the humble tribe begin to shine, for it takes real humility to confess that there is more to life and existence than can be explained by human reason. Such folk understand that Jesus is praying that each day we may be fed from the mystery meal that empowers us to go about His business in the world, even when we don't understand our critical place in His plans.

I said, in passing, that when I speak of those who live within a transcendent narrative, I don't only mean Christians. We, who embrace Christianity, would be well-advised to expand our awareness beyond the church doors – to the other tribes of God's children. It is an act of the greatest arrogance to imagine that we un-

derstand God's purposes. We don't understand the critical place each of us, church and unchurch alike, stands within God's will. My oldest friend describes himself as “a lukewarm agnostic”. He has nothing to do with churches, generally, save weddings and funerals, yet he understands the world as transcending human analysis and has practiced transcendental meditation for as long as I've know him. His discussions with me very often move my sermon on when, as with this one, my thoughts hit a rock. The voices from outside the church are often more helpful than we cranky old men within the church would like to admit, and we would be well advised to heed even the voices from outside our tribe. Pope Francis, speaking on inclusion in *Evangelii Gaudium*, said:

**“I prefer a church which is bruised, hurting**

**and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security,”**

The mystery meal for which Jesus prays is the supersubstantial transcendental essential which allows us to remove tribalism from its status as idol, so that we may see all of God's children as beloved of God.

Here's the place I stop preaching and start meddling. We live in a harrowing time in which none of the tribes are on speaking terms with the others. In fact, our tribes seem to have given up negotiating in favor of demonizing the other. Those who seek power can use technology to identify the sacred ideas of a tribe and amplify them, saying, “Come! Gather around our tribe's campfire from which we will loose fiery hell upon the neighboring tribe for we measure virtue only by the shibboleths of our tribe.” One candidate even said that



he believed he could shoot someone in the streets and not lose any votes, so powerful is the voice of tribalism. He said more than he intended. We have become like desperate spinsters who beg every suitor to “lie to me, baby”. We have come to accept that we no longer care for the truth of what is told us, but only whether what we are being told affirms the narrative of our tribe.

In the Epistle for today, Paul wrote to the church in Colossae on this identical issue:

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ.

We are starving, church! We have settled for junk food when we could feast upon a mystery meal which never runs out. Give us this day, oh Lord, the supersubstantial transcendental essential without which we have no life within us.

AMEN

## **BENEDICTION**

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn wrote, “If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?”<sup>2</sup>

When we measure our brothers and sisters against the righteousness of our tribe, and find our tribe the righteous, and theirs the unrighteous, we would do well to remember who is the source of all righteousness and acknowledge that it may be our tribe who is failing God.

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<sup>2</sup> Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago* 1918-1956

***Go with us, Lord, and guide the way  
Through this and every coming day,  
That in your Spirit strong and true  
Our lives may be our gift to you.***

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*Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.*

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