

Bread for the Journey
Wednesday, March 18, 2009
Exodus; John 6; "Give Us This Day..."

Imagine we're going on a journey. I like that word better than *trip* or *vacation*. Our forebears who came to these shores weren't merely on a trip, much less a vacation! When astronauts venture to the moon or Mars, they won't be on a joyride but a *journey*. And when anyone, from Jack Kerouac to Martin Luther King, Jr. to Jesus, uses travel as a metaphor for the human experience, it's not to say, "Life's a day-trip." No; life's a *journey*, and we must be prepared for dangers, delays, and detours. *Journey* carries a sense of adventure into the unknown that's missing from words like *travel*, *trip*, *jaunt* or *junket*.

When we set out on a journey, what do we need? It helps to know our destination, at least in a general way. We'll need to re-orient ourselves frequently when we get lost because of detours or dead ends; discouraged by setbacks; frightened by hazardous conditions; or distracted by tourist traps and overly-comfy motels along the way.

In this journey of life, we should heed the orienting words given to us by the only One who has traversed it from start to finish and beyond. Those words begin with: *Our Father who art in Heaven....*

Jesus says this: our life's journey isn't a trek to the stars; individual pilgrimages to shrines of self-fulfillment; or a dead-end voyage of futility and annihilation. It's a homecoming. Whether we're exiles or runaways; whether we feel like we've been deported, or told that we're orphans; whether we knew it, forgot it, dimly sense it, or doubt it, *Jesus invites us on a journey with him* to His Father's house and heart.

What else do we need? AAA says to *take what we need, but travel light*. We can't bring everything, but we *can* consider the likely weather and pack accordingly. We can't foresee every problem, but *can* tote a first aid kit and pocket-knife. Experienced travelers pack essential items that do double duty and eliminate everything else.

Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive. Jesus tells us to travel light, too. Sin, resentment, and grudges are unnecessary baggage on our journey to His Father's house. They weigh us down and tire us out. The only double duty they do is to alienate us from God -the destination of our journey - and from one another; and it's a *long* ride in the back seat if all we're going to do is fight or pout!

Forgiveness rightly given and received is like a Swiss army knife! It cuts through resentment; pares away guilt; repairs relationships; skewers false pride; and frees us to "keep on keepin' on" without fuss, drama, or excess "stuff." All of us should pack it and share it liberally.

We have to be ready for trouble, too, on a journey. A water bottle or safety flare is crucial if things go wrong far from help. Like Bear Grylls or Survivorman, we might need skill, determination and whatever we can scavenge, just to survive another day. And we must learn to help one another when we're stranded, lost or hurt; as Ben Franklin quipped, if we don't hang together, we *will* hang separately!

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Jesus, who has walked in one end of the valley of the shadow of death and out the other, knows that perils, from fatigue and hunger to the forces of sin, evil and death, await us. *I am the way*, He says. That's truth, not just poetry! Clinging to him for dear life is the only way of completing our journey without falling into deadly cesspools of sin, falling off crumbling cliffs of pride, or being sucked into whirlpools of despair. Only he can thread a safe pathway through it all, for us all.

But what about food for the journey? Unlike clothes we can re-wear or pocket knives that do double duty, that's not true of food. We can carry water bottles and freeze-dried food. But eventually (especially if the journey is long) our supplies run out. What then?

You're probably thinking Arby's or Bob Evans! They've made traveling less like digestive roulette. But imagine crossing the Great Plains by wagon train. Shooting or gathering food would be a daily concern.

Like the Israelites in the wilderness, you'd long for food from the old country. You'd be tempted to hoard roots or dried meat; tomorrow's landscape might be devoid of sustenance except for grubs, locusts and other unmentionables. Without a regular source of food - Arby's or wild hickory nuts - the journey is *over* before it's *completed*.

Give us this day our daily bread. Jesus knows our fears and needs; he invites us to lay them at his Father's feet. What we need, we can't carry; what we can carry isn't all we need. Here at the middle of Jesus' journey-prayer, he reveals our vulnerability and limitations. He gives us simple words that encompass a lifetime of need. *Give, we pray. Give* life's simplest staples: bread, water, path, hope, and home. *Give;* we can't buy, earn, carry, grow or inherit them. *Give;* without them, we die.

But we don't pray, *Give me*, but rather, *Give us*. There's a critical difference between the survival shows *Survivorman* and *Man vs. Wild*. In the former, Les Stroud tackles the wilderness alone; in the latter, Bear Grylls sets out with a small team. Even though we don't see the others (Bear is the star, after all!), his blog describes how important the team is, and how members entrust their lives into each other's care. And although there are times in *our* life when we're completely "on our own," they're infrequent. Our life's journey is in the company of other people. Some are close companions; others, we don't see or even know. Jesus reminds us that our journey is undertaken with *all* of them;

and we pray for *all* of them - no; for all of *us*. *Give us this day our daily bread*: we confess that nobody "goes it alone" like Survivorman. We learn to entrust our lives into each other's care - and into God's.

Give us today... It's easy to look back in nostalgia and homesickness, or ahead in anticipation or fear. To be grounded in *today* is tough! Dealing with *today's* complications and demands, without losing sight of our final destination, is tough! You know the joke: when you're up to your neck in alligators, it's hard to remember that you're there to clear the swamp. So Jesus grounds us in the present. *Whatever* today brings, we're brought back to basics: Father, help us. Give us what we need to make it through today as together we continue our journey with Jesus.

Give us today our daily bread. Yup, we gotta ask every day. We gotta trust God every day. We gotta work together every day. Like folks in AA, our motto is "one day at a time." Like Luther's words on repentance, "Every day we ask for the old Adam to be drowned and a new person in Christ be raised up." We don't just "get it right" once and think we're done with it. We *never* become self-reliant on life's journey; but we may *always* pray to our heavenly Father in confident trust!

There's a twist to this simple phrase. In Greek it also reads, "Give us today the bread *of tomorrow*." There's an ordinary word for *daily*, so the Gospels hint at something important in Jesus' Aramaic phrase.

He doesn't tell us to ask today for bread tomorrow, but to pray that "the bread of tomorrow" should be given to us today. A possible paraphrase is: "Give us *today* a taste of the meal that celebrates our journey's end. Give us a foretaste of the feast to come, while we're still pilgrims in this barren land." Ultimately, we pray, "Today, give us yourself, the true and living bread of our heavenly home; or we perish."

Jesus centers *everything* about our life's journey - destination, path, supplies, protection, and food - in *himself*. He orients us to His Father's Kingdom. He is bread for the journey. From *him* flows living water to refresh and cleanse us. He heals and forgives our sins; he gives his Spirit so we can forgive each other. He is our Rod and Staff through the barren wastes of temptations and trials; he is our mighty fortress against the foe that assails us. He is our rock in a weary land; he is the way to the Father's house; he is our hope, our heart's delight.

Give us today the bread of the Kingdom: with that, we discover that whenever we pray the Lord's Prayer, the heart of it is simply: *Father, give us **Jesus**, now and always. Amen.*