

Our
 Reading from the Old Testament: Exodus 16:3; 11-18
 Readings from the Gospels: Matthew 6:11; 26:26

So tell me, how do you pronounce the word spelled O-U-R?

Curiously, I think I am hearing different opinions on the matter. Is it one syllable or two? Well, let's just go to the web, because everything's true on the internet, right? Except, that's no help because the language tutorials are all over the place, pursing or pulling back their lips in ways you have never seen the English language uttered.

One syllable or two. I guess it doesn't matter all that much, unless, of course, you are attempting to coerce a group into articulating the word in unison, like say, with a choir... So, Zach, suppose you get this new choral arrangement of *The Lord's Prayer* and before the tenors start clinching their backsides, preparing for *the power and the glory, forever...*, you walk them through the measure voicing *Give us this day*. How will you instruct them to sing the next word?

R or Ow-er? Will you imitate a pirate? Arrr... Or, will you forget to set your clocks back one ... hour? Either way, what is significant about the word when you pray the Lord's Prayer is that you are not just

thinking of yourself, alone. Our - grammatically it is identified as a possessive determiner, but that is a bit misleading in the context of the Lord's Prayer, for speaking of *Our Father, which art in heaven* is very different than speaking of *Our Chevy, which art in the garage*. We do not own God, but are, in fact, owned by God. The Psalmist declares, "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." The Apostle acknowledges, "Whether we live, or whether we die, we are the Lord's."

In addition, when the prayer mentions *our daily bread*, it is not an arrogant assessment of what you have produced, possessed, and deserved. Rather, it is an acknowledgement that we are incomplete beings dependent on sources and resources outside of ourselves no matter the extent of our daily labors or wealth.

Give us this day our daily bread. Even if you are a baker extraordinaire and possess the recipes all your relatives covet, did you sow the seed, irrigate the soil, grow the crop, harvest the wheat, extract the chaff, design the equipment, manufacture the combine, sharpen the tines, replace the stalk deflectors, drive the truck to the grain elevator, all while staying glued to the Weather Channel? Okay, even if you did, and according to my calculations that would reduce the potential

candidates here to about ... one of you, the recipe for a basic loaf of bread might include salt, butter, yeast, and water. So, bakers, where did the water come from; did you churn the butter, milk the cattle, create the cow, mine the salt, manufacture the oven? No?

When we pray, *Give us this day our daily bread*, we are acknowledging our reliance on thousands of people we have never met. In addition, with each bite of the biscuit, we are unconsciously confessing our reliance upon a logistical puzzle we cannot begin to imagine ever possessing the ingenuity to create and maintain. And how would we survive without the intricate cycles of the natural world and the creative genius of a God who had your needs in mind eons before Jimmy Carter sold his first peanut crop to the folks at Skippy?

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow. Praise Him all creatures here below. It is nearly incomprehensible when you try to picture all the people, processes, forces, and resources involved in bringing you that slice of whole grain toast you slathered with apple butter this morning. My agriculture consigliere, Bill Ramsey, said that when you consider the ordering of seasons in the temperate zone, there is never a time without wheat being harvested somewhere around the globe.

Of course, any nutritionist will tell you that bread is not the primary ingredient in a healthy diet, and health consciousness requires many to foreswear bread altogether, but bread remains a powerful symbol to proclaim that life is a gift, that God's love is manifested in the resources that keep us alive. Back in Exodus, when the Israelites lamented the growling of their empty stomachs in the wilderness, God provided. "In the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, 'What is it?' For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, 'It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat.'"

The God who creates is also the God who sustains. *Give us this day our daily bread.* The 16th Century Heidelberg Catechism interprets this fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer like this: "Do take care of all our physical needs so that we come to know that you are the only source of everything good, and that neither our work and worry nor your gifts can do us any good without your blessing. And so help us to give up our trust in creatures and trust in you alone." Similarly, the 17th Century

Shorter Catechism of Westminster states that in this fourth petition, "We pray that of God's free gift we may receive a competent portion of the good things of this life, and enjoy his blessing with them."

Yet, the meaning of the bread extends beyond our sustenance, for through Christ, the God who creates and sustains, also redeems. And so it is that on the night of his arrest and after having given thanks, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and he broke it, saying, "This is my body, broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me." The Divine love that provides the grain of the earth to sustain us is the same Divine love that refuses to abandon us and will not leave us estranged. The sustaining love that feeds us is also the redeeming love that draws us close so that nothing in all creation separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Whether you prefer sourdough or saltine, bagel or bruschetta, what you taste is a celebration of our Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer.

You may ask, *All of this for little old me?* Well, in a word ... no. *Give us this day **our** daily bread.* Note that the prayer with which Jesus instructs us says not *my daily bread*, but ***our** daily bread*. Why is that? That's an important question on this World Communion Sunday.

Did you know that in any given week, the folks at *The Great Harvest Bread Co.* offer 14 different varieties of bread, everything from rosemary garlic to extreme cinnamon swirl? If you grab lunch with three friends, the choices offered by the restaurant may mean that your sandwiches are served on four different kinds of bread. Will that be white, whole wheat, rye, gluten-free, pretzel roll, or ciabatta? We have the luxury of choice, and that luxury lulls us into a false sense of abundance that belies the reality of hunger among a hefty percentage of this world's population.

We will occasionally hear reports of the tensions between the Ukraine and Russia, but were you aware that over 42% of **working** Ukrainians live in poverty? The National Academy of Medical Sciences in Ukraine reports that 80% of single people or individual elderly couples lives in poverty. And, as a result of the continuing conflict with Russia, there are approximately 1.5 million internally displaced Ukrainians.

Our, we may not be sure how to pronounce it, but we should continually be reminded of what it means when we say it. When we pray *Give us this day our daily bread*, we are acknowledging that we do

not live alone in this world, expressing our desire that all would be fed, and committing ourselves to participate in the alleviation of hunger.

Remember the manna in the wilderness: *those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed.*

The Community of Sant'Egidio, a Catholic lay organization and partner of Presbyterian World Mission is responding to the plight of the Ukrainians with programs to alleviate hunger, support education, and provide for public health.

With equal energy and intention, Presbyterian Mission Co-workers Dessa and Cobbie Palm continue in their work of treating the *our* of the Lord's Prayer with sincerity and faithfulness among the poor of the Philippines. Cobbie tells a story that demonstrates how God is at work through such efforts to bring healing where hope has been stretched thin.

Attending an online panel discussion on "Social Economic Reforms for Sustainability," Cobbie was impressed by a young student named Roland who was selected for the panel because of his academic

achievement. "Roland passionately and sincerely spoke about rice and hunger during the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic, Roland argued, 'has been threatening and taking lives, but just as severe a threat and as violent a killer is the Rice Tariffication Law, which took effect [in] 2019.'" Roland said, "Hunger in the Philippines today has reached an unprecedented high of 30% of all households in the country." He demonstrated how this was the result not just because of pandemic related unemployment, but also because of the impact of the tariffication law on the price of rice.

After all the panelists had spoken, Cobbie sent a generic message of congratulations to the panelists, not expecting a response. So, he was surprised when he received a reply from Roland, the very student that had so impressed him. The message said, "Mr. Palm, you came to our school and taught us a song, thank you. I hope you remember me." Having visited so many schools, Cobbie confesses that he could not remember. Yet, when Roland replied with the name of the school, Cobbie looked through his files for the Sunbeam Day Care Center, another partner of the Presbyterian Mission Agency and the United Congregational Church.

The file triggered his memory. Cobbie says it was a difficult day navigating their way through the section of Manilla neighboring the port. They were guided from the road down a dark narrow alley of abject poverty. In the dark gloom, they walked single file over slabs of wood, elevating their steps from muddy wastewater below. To each side were walls of repurposed wood, then a doorway or a window that revealed a room to the left, then to the right, each room serving as a whole home for a family. But soon there was the sound of children counting in unison. The dark alleyway led them to a larger room with children's chairs and tables, where the students in the next room would come for their daily bread. It was The Sunbeam Day Care Center, where the sun did not beam but where children were still gathered learning together. Cobbie says the local sponsoring church, "believing that a mission endeavor can have a significant impact, refused to lose hope."

Cobbie remembers that walking away from the stark setting of such overwhelming poverty and hunger, he wasn't as confident in their hopes. Yet, years later, Roland, the bright young man, so poised as he spoke in the panel discussion, awakened Cobbie to the indomitable

Spirit of God. What he hadn't been able to see at the time, he could see now - a mission endeavor reaching into overwhelming poverty - nurturing a child with a new song - and witnessing that student using a well-deserved scholarship to access the tools to discern the structures that need to be challenged to alleviate hunger and poverty. (*Mission Crossroads*, Presbyterian Mission Agency)

Give us this day our daily bread. The One who sustains us in ways far beyond our imaginings is also the One who calls on us to join in the work of sustaining all. A children's prayer will suffice: By Thy hand we all are fed, so let us share, dear Lord, our daily bread. Amen.