

1 Lent YC 2020

Tomorrow's Bread
By the Rev. Salying Wong

Today, I'm thinking of a story about children and bread. During the bombing raids of WWII, thousands of children were orphaned and left to starve. Some were rescued and placed in refugee camps where they received food and care. But many of these children who had lost so much could not sleep at night. They feared waking up to find themselves once again homeless and without food. Nothing seemed to reassure them. Finally, someone hit upon the idea of giving each child a piece of bread to hold at bedtime. Holding their bread, these children could finally sleep in peace.

Lord, give us this day tomorrow's bread. That's the actual translation. For centuries, we've prayed, "Give us this day our daily bread." But, the actual translation is "tomorrow's bread." I remember Sarah Ruden, the quaker scholar of ancient classical Greek texts, telling this to the hosts of the podcast, "The Bible for Normal People." They were blown away. What! They exclaimed, "Wait a minute, my whole world is changing." If you'd like to read her explanation on this, we have her book, *The Face of Water*, in our library.

We pray for tomorrow's bread because tomorrow is as unseen as our deepest anxieties and insecurities. How can we control what tomorrow will bring? How can we survive the unknown? And that's why the devil in our Gospel reading is tempting Jesus with the ability to conjure up bread whenever he wants, so that he is without any insecurities. Have your bread today. Have your bread tomorrow. Have your bread always. Why be insecure? What need is there of need?

That's the general thrust of all the temptations—fill your need for God with everything but God. Those things that bring you safety and security, power and control, esteem and affection—satisfy those by whatever means possible. By your own power. By accumulation and domination. By glorifying yourself. By no

means, sit quietly with your need and your craving for safety and security. By no means, gently release the tug for power and control. By no means, slow your avarice for esteem and affection. These needs and impulses derive their own universe and its one rule is that if you do not satisfy them, you will die! Come on, let's be practical around here. Come on Jesus, how could it hurt? You've had nothing to eat for forty days and nights. How could it hurt?

When the choir of angels sang at Jesus' birth and the host of heaven manifested in all its glory, this glory was revealed not in places of power and dominion, not in the warmth of homes and at tables full of bread. But, glory was revealed in the lowliest place. The angels sang to the outcast shepherds in wilderness fields. That's how the kingdom of God works. And as Jesus is tempted in the wilderness, as he makes his way toward Jerusalem, God's glory will not be found in Caesar or in the most religiously righteous, but on a path leading to the cross—a doomed effort as anyone can see. So when the devil is tempting Jesus, he is trying to detour him, make him turn back to the universe of safety and security, power and control, esteem and affection. When Jesus responds to the devil, he says it to all of us who get caught up in our anxieties about tomorrow's bread, "No one lives by bread alone."

No one lives by bread alone. We have built in us a hunger only God can fill. And when we are quiet enough to perceive this need, honor this need, surrender to this need, we will see our hot pursuits for what they really are—pursuits that do not ultimately liberate us.

Those children who held their bread to sleep share with all humanity an anxiety about tomorrow—the unknown. In time, every person will become conscious of an unspoken hunger that bread cannot satisfy. This is the hunger for God. Some will be caught up in the chaos of hot pursuits, using all the same old tools for a new question. But today, Jesus speaks to us on this first Sunday of Lent, honor the hunger, don't control it, but surrender to it. Be in need. Be in need of God. Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of God.