

Daily bread amid luxury (John 6:24-35)

Living outside poverty is a wonderful thing, but it leaves one open to the temptation of a divided heart.

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I have a wonderful, terrible confession to make. Part of my morning routine, as the coffee kicks in and the brain wakes up, is to read the daily comics. (If you're old enough, you'll remember that Ronald Reagan was the same way.)

And of course, like many people these days, I don't take a morning paper in the dead-tree format: I do most of my reading online. So I open a few browser tabs and skim through some unsettling number of comics before I get on with the day.

At the same time, I have always been the sort of person who finds it difficult to maintain a rhythm of daily prayer. (If you're old enough, you'll remember that many ministers are the same way.) So I've hit on a solution: the first tab I open every morning is the [Northumbria Community morning office](#).

It works brilliantly: I almost never miss a day. It might be minimal, but it brings to mind something a physical trainer said about the perfect exercise routine: walk 7.5 minutes out from your front door, turn around, and walk 7.5 minutes back. Why? Because the best routine is the one you do every day.

Here's the terrible part: because, like many Americans, I have the terrible habit of eating breakfast in front of a screen, I often make the coffee and a bagel before

firing up the laptop. (If you're young enough, you'll know you might be the same way.) Which means I have to make a conscious effort to avoid having a mouth stuffed full of bread while reading:

Who is it that you seek? *We seek the Lord our God.*

Do you seek Him with all your heart? *Amen. Lord, have mercy.*

Do you seek Him with all your soul? *Amen. Lord, have mercy.*

Do you seek Him with all your mind? *Amen. Lord, have mercy.*

Do you seek Him with all your strength? *Amen. Christ, have mercy.*

To put things another way, when Jesus chastises the crowd for seeking him “because you ate your fill of the loaves,” I often think, meekly, “Guilty as charged?” God has been good to our family, as to many Americans, and finding a regular supply of breakfast is not a worry. The concern is rather not to let the abundance—of food, of entertainment—become a distraction from the central calling to seek God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, all our strength.

Living outside poverty is a wonderful thing in many ways, but as Jesus pointed out so often, it leaves one open to the temptation of a divided heart.

Like anyone who calls themselves a Christian, I would like to think that my highest priority is to be fed on the bread of heaven. But I also know that I like my many little luxuries and sometimes let them get in the way. So I have to tell myself every morning that the first part of each call-and-response is a healthy reminder of what Christians are all called to in life.

But the important part may not be the first half, but the second: “Amen, Lord have mercy.” Literally, *May it be so. God, be compassionate.* It may be pretty minimal, even if it is before breakfast, but then, like many Christians, in the end it's all I've got. (If you're human enough, you'll know you might be the same way.)