

Devotions – June 7 - 13, 2015
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Sunday, June 7, 2015

Praying the Psalms

Text: Psalm 4:1-3

Answer me when I call, O God of my right! You gave me room when I was in distress. Be gracious to me, and hear my prayer. How long, you people, shall my honor suffer shame? How long will you love vain words, and seek after lies? But know that the Lord has set apart the faithful for himself; the Lord hears when I call to him.

“Are you listening to me?” we ask spouse, children, co-workers. “Is anyone listening to me?” we cry when wounded by other’s words or actions. One of the greatest gifts any human can give to another is to listen; really listen. Active listening is a valid, if common, communication skill that gets lost in our conversations. If only we didn’t have so much to say and such “wise” advice to offer.

No wonder the psalmist cries out for God to listen. God does listen and God hears us; hears the words of our hearts. God hears those words we never have the opportunity to share with one another; the words that we long for someone to hear and understand. Unlike the rest of us, God really does have something important to say. And yet, God listens patiently when we call.

This calls to mind another verse found in Psalm 8. “What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?” (vs.4) If anyone had reason to avoid listening to me, it’s God. And yet, God listens; with love, God listens; with grace, God listens; with complete understanding, God listens.

Let us pray: Ever-listening God, thank you for your abiding presence in our lives. Thank you for your welcoming love that hears all that we are saying, including those words we really don’t want anyone else to hear. As you hear us, open our ears and hearts to hear one another. Grant us the grace to listen that others might know the gift of your love. Amen.



Monday, June 8, 2015

Text: Psalm 9:1-2, 9-10

I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart; I will tell of all your wonderful deeds. I will be glad and exult in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High.

The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O Lord have not forsaken those who seek you.

One gift of the Psalms is the way prayers are uttered, faith is proclaimed, God's way is worshipped, and confession is made. And often, all within the same Psalm.

The first verses of this Psalm come to mind when driving through this beautiful northern country on a sunny day. Looking at the trees that seem to touch the bright blue sky, with leaves so many lovely shades of green, moves me to give thanks with all of my being. I am filled with joy in God's creation and songs of praise rise up in my heart. Giving thanks comes so easily when everywhere I look, the world is beautiful.

The expression of gratitude changes when the sky is dark and it is challenging to see anything on the roadway. The thankfulness remains, but rather than a song of praise welling up, a whispered prayer for safekeeping recalls the many times in the past when God has been present in the dark moments of life. There is something very reassuring in the contrast. Rain or shine, God is present.

Let us pray: Almighty God, thank you filling our world and our lives with so many moments of beauty and deep joy. Thank you for your comforting presence in the sorrow and ugliness that life brings. Help us to be as diligent about giving thanks in the darkness as we are in the light. Amen.



Tuesday, June 9, 2015

Text: Psalm 18:1-6

I love you, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised, so I shall be saved from my enemies. The cords of death encompassed me; the torrents of perdition assailed me; the cords of Sheol entangled me; the snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called upon the Lord; to my God I cried for help. From his temple, he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears.

The thing about praying the Psalms is that the psalmist has already done the hard work of finding the words to express common feelings. I really wanted to leave out the middle verses - the cords, the torrents, the snares, and the distress. Yet, it is as the psalmist recalls all from which the Lord delivered him that his praises ring so true and ignite my passions for praising God. Pick a Psalm, any Psalm and its words will guide our prayer.

I remember singing a portion of this Psalm at camp, with all the typical gyrations and hand movements. There is one movement that I still repeat each time I hear these words. As I pound my fist into the palm of my hand, "blessed be the rock," becomes a body prayer of gratitude for

the strength and the stronghold of God. The situation is not immediately rectified, the pain does not suddenly go away, but “fist to hand,” I know, without a doubt, that God is present and God will deliver me.

Let us pray: *O Lord, my strength. You are my rock, my fortress and my deliverer. You are so much stronger, and so much greater than any gesture can describe. When faced with issues and situations that make it difficult to stand, hold me up by your great power. When I long for a rock so I can hide, cover me with your strong protection. When I am afraid, save me from my enemies. You alone, are worthy to be praised. Amen.*



Wednesday, June 10, 2015

Text: Psalm 25:1-7

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me. Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame; let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous. Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long. Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O Lord! (Pro tip: Read the entire Psalm if you have time.)

Sometimes when a church council meets, it is necessary to deal with controversial issues and each person might come with their own strong opinion about the decisions that need to be made. This is not unique to council meetings, but occurs whenever a group of diverse people come together to resolve disputes. Yet, the leadership team of a worshipping community is different than community businesses and organizations who rely strictly on Robert's Rules of Order for conducting business. We may use standard procedures in conducting meetings, but we also rely on the presence of the Holy Spirit in our midst when considering the business before us.

Beginning with these words as an opening prayer, “To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me,” establishes an environment of looking to God for the answers. Speaking a verse or two into a discussion that is difficult restores us to our equal positions as God's beloved children. In these words, we are reminded that our work is not about us, but about partnering with God and walking in God's ways.

We still may not agree, but inviting God to lead us in the way of the righteous may help us to stand on God's truth and God's desires rather than our own. Each time we stumble, even fail miserably to listen with loving hearts, our acceptance of God's conviction allows us to accept God's forgiveness for us and for those with whom we disagree.

Let us pray: *Thank you, God, for the power of your Holy Spirit, who brings to mind the words we need to hear, the sin we need to admit, the forgiveness we cannot live without, and the grace to live with you and your people. Amen.*



Thursday, June 11, 2015

Text: Psalm 34:3-8, 17-19

O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together. I sought the Lord, and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears, Look to him and be radiant as your faces shall never be ashamed. This poor soul cried, and was heard by the Lord, and was saved from every trouble. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them. O taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are those who take refuge in him. When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears, and rescues them from all their troubles. The Lord is near the broken hearted and saves the crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord rescues them all.

The day after my husband's funeral in 2006, I turned to my daily devotion and was greeted by these words, "This poor soul cried, and was heard by the Lord, and was saved from every trouble." After reading through a devotion that really didn't seem to relate, I got out my Bible to read the entire Psalm. It was there that I found God, ready to speak peace to me. My Bible still has all the notes I scribbled that day, the bold Yes! at nearly every verse.

"O taste and see that the Lord is good." How can anyone do that after saying a much too soon goodbye to a loved one? By God's love, I could...that day, anyway. Reading through this Psalm, praying through this Psalm, I was able to experience joy in the midst of pain. God really is close to the brokenhearted, eager and willing to save the crushed in spirit. Even as I wept, pleading with God to return my husband to me, I was filled with a deep sense of joy in God's enormous

Some things in life are just too hard to bear on our own. God gave us one another to get us through the tough times. But when the other is gone, God remains, offering refuge, rescue, and redemption. O magnify the Lord with me!

Let us pray: *Lord God, our rescuer, we give you thanks for all the ways you show your love; for sending Jesus to suffer and die for us; for sending your Holy Spirit to keep you always present; for confirmation that you do suffer along with us; for those around us who are bearers of your goodness. Lead us, this day, to care for the brokenhearted, the crushed in spirit, that they too might taste your goodness. Amen.*



Friday, June 12, 2015

Text: Psalm 37:1-9

**Do not fret because of the wicked; do not be envious of wrongdoers,
for they will soon fade like the grass, and wither like the green herb.
Trust in the Lord, and do good; so you will live in the land, and enjoy security.
Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.
Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act.
He will make your vindication shine like the light,
and the justice of your cause like the noonday.
Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him; do not fret over those who prosper
in their way, over those who carry out evil devices.
Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath. Do not fret—it leads only to evil.
For the wicked shall be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land.**

I was raised by a mama who lived her life according to St. Paul's words to the Philippians 4:11b: "...for I have learned to be content with whatever I have." Like Paul, she too had many reasons to not be content and yet, relying on God, she focused on contentment. We know that picking one verse out of the bible does not a faith make. However, along with everything else Paul had to say, my mother found a solid truth in his statement that enabled her to live in joy, despite circumstances.

Not to be outdone, I selected an entire Psalm for my family life. It's a lengthy Psalm that covers so much of our daily experience. Following Jesus can be really hard to do, especially in the midst of a culture that seems to be keeping him at bay. Pointing out what is wrong comes easily to me, but the psalmist invites us to trust in God, to take delight in the Lord so we might be given our heart's desire.

It's easy to struggle with our heart's desire when there is so much to be desired, but it gets narrowed down quickly when we take delight in God. As we delight in who God is and all that God has provided, our hearts change. Our heart's desire becomes God's desire and God continues to give us all we need to love God and love our neighbor.

Let us pray: *Gracious God, you are so good, you hold us close and show us your ways. Give to us the ability to wait patiently for you, to commit our ways to you, to trust you to act for good in every area of our lives. Help us to commit ourselves to following only you, to desiring only what you desire.*



Saturday, June 13, 2015

Text: Psalm 121

I lift up my eyes to the hills, from where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is your keeper; the

Lord is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in, from this time on and forever.

I love and cherish the gifts of God's graces. No matter what I know about God, I am still so amazed and so touched when God grants the tiniest grace into my undeserving life. After my husband's transplant surgery in 1996, he was placed in a very tiny room with no windows, no bathroom and no place for guests to sit. I was not happy and, unfortunately, I shared my dissatisfaction with too many hardworking and caring people.

Our pastor and his wife drove through the night to be with us as my husband awoke after surgery. It was Psalm 121 that Gordon shared with us, reminding us that God was present, that God knew everything that was happening and that God was in control. After we prayed, we visited for a while and I began to wish I could take back all the complaining words I had spoken to those who were caring so well for my loved one. Before I had an opportunity to apologize, several nurses came in to prepare my husband for a move down the hall.

Once they had him settled comfortably in a larger room, with a bathroom and plenty of chairs for us all, one of the nurses opened the blinds. The sun was shining, the grass was green, but what immediately caught our eyes were the hills in the distances. "I lift my eyes....."

Let us pray: *Even when we least deserve it, O God, you grace us with signs of your presence. How can anything hurt us? How can we worry about the future? How can we put our trust in anything but you when you are so obvious, not just in the big moments, but in the littlest moments of all? Thank you.*

