

August 2, 2020

Praying along the Way Jesus sends us

Call to worship:

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth (Psalm 124:8)

Prayers of Praise, Confession, and Supplication:

O God,

you who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,

ever three yet ever one,

you are our God and greatly to be praised.

When we are brought low, you raise us up.

When we call on you, you are near.

As we approach you in this time of worship,

draw near to us,

renew in us the joy of your salvation,

and grant us the courage to continue walking the way you send us,

to make known to all people your mighty deeds,

for your glory and the world's good.

Amen.

Hymn #507 "Break now the bread of life"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XvLXaN6hZvU>

God's word read and interpreted:

Over the years the church has endured plagues, epidemics, social upheavals, wars, rising and falling cultural influence, and a host of other struggles. Through it all, the Body of Christ has found sustenance in the psalms. In communal worship. In the private prayers of individual believers. And in the worship of individual households.

In the psalms God has provided for us a prayer book. It is in prayer that we connect with the God who lives, who is stable, and who is greater than our current struggles.

Today I am starting a new series of sermons called "Praying along the Way Jesus sends us." I hope that by becoming familiar with some of the psalms that have been prayed by generations of believers – Christians and Jews alike, you will be encouraged, if you're not already doing so, to join them in using the prayer book our triune God has gifted to us.

We'll start with Psalm 145.

READ PSALM 145.

Psalm 145 begins and ends with a resolution:

I will extol you, my God and King,
and bless your name forever and ever.
Every day I will bless you,
and praise your name forever and ever....
My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD,
and all flesh will bless his holy name forever and ever.

What a great way that would be to start each day!

As your feet touch the ground each morning, proclaim that today, I will bless my God and King and praise His name throughout the day.

Psalm 145 has been attributed to King David who had some personal encounters with the living God which gave him reason to praise God. He also inherited the stories of his ancestors. He inherited the stories of Moses' encounters with God. From Exodus 33 and 34 he inherited a statement of belief: The Lord is gracious, merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, good to all, with compassion over all things.

This is who God is. And He doesn't change according to our circumstances.

So, every day, and all day, I will praise you, O Lord.

Perhaps you have not experienced this gracious, merciful, and compassionate God?

The truth is, however, that this is the God who revealed himself for us in Jesus. The God who left the divine fellowship to live the life of a human. To share our struggles and joys. This is the Messiah who went to the cross to forgive sin and bring us back with him into the divine fellowship.

The final section of the psalm expounds the characteristics of an ideal king. A good king has the best interest of his subjects at heart. A good king upholds all who are falling, satisfies the desire of every living thing, and watches over all who love him.

We worship the Lord because he is this ideal king.

But don't take my word for it.

Offer your king your supplications.

"The LORD is near to all who call on him,
who call on him in truth."

Which brings us to the main point of this sermon. To call on the LORD in truth means that you pray honestly. That what you say is a true expression of your own sentiments.

Timothy Keller describes the psalms as the “divinely ordained way to learn devotion to our God.”¹ I have found that when you commit to learning devotion to God in the way God has ordained, it is unhelpful to approach the psalms as something to get through. Setting goals such as reading all 150 in one month, might serve a purpose; however, when you simply read the words without being affected by them, it is counter-productive to your own spiritual growth and, I imagine, offensive to God who has given us this resource so that we may learn faithful devotion.

Far more energizing is to read – or if you prefer to use audio versions over print, you can buy audio copies, find them on YouTube – the psalm slowly. Repeatedly. Commit it to memory. And ask questions which will personalize the psalm and thus make your meditations truthful expressions of your own sentiments. Even if you only get through a couple of verses a week!

Simply saying “I will praise the LORD,” is not in itself an act of worship.

It’s a good intention.

It’s like saying “I will mow the lawn today.” That’s a fine intention, but if you don’t actually get the lawn mower out of the garage, start the engine, and walk back and forth across your lawn, it’s dishonest. It means nothing.

Similarly, saying “I will praise the Lord because he is gracious and merciful” is like saying “I will mow the lawn because Toro makes a good lawn mower.” It might be true. But if you’ve never experienced a Toro lawn mower it’s not personal and it’s not honest.

The purpose of praying the psalms is not solely to repeat someone else’s words. These poems and prayers aren’t magic formulae by which simply saying the words commands the mysteries of the universe. The purpose of praying the psalms is to bring your own prayers under the example of the psalm. To make what the psalmist has said your own sentiment. And so, you need to pause and ask questions:

How do I understand the living God as King? Do I?

How do I, or how should I relate to the God we know in Jesus as King?

I wonder how many of us do. We might think of Jesus as our helper or our cheerleader, but our King?

¹ Timothy and Kathy Keller, *The Songs of Jesus*, vii, Viking publishing, 2015.

If you proclaim “I will praise the name of the LORD forever and ever,” you need to know why. In your experience, why is God worthy of praise?

People need to know a stable and greater-than-us king who is looking out for our salvation. As we walk the way Jesus sends us in our current situation, Christians need to know personally the heavenly Father, we need to know the Holy Spirit, we need to know Jesus so that through us others will know God too. Each day as we roll out of bed in the morning, we begin a new story. The story begins with the resolution: “I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever.” The story unfolds throughout the day as we interact with family members, our neighbours, colleagues, and even our own thoughts and attitudes.

How do the stories you write each day reveal the abundant goodness of the King?

How does what you say about God and how you speak about hope, build God’s fame and reputation in the imagination of others?

Does the story you are writing make known to all people God’s mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of God’s kingdom?

Prayer, shaped by generations who have served the Lord in the midst of war, famine, plague, epidemic, environmental devastation, racial tensions, and political upheavals is a God-ordained way by which we can cultivate that knowledge and that relationship.

Praying the psalms requires us to read – or listen to – the words slowly enough and often enough that we can appropriate the thoughts as our own. Not just to memorize and repeat someone else’s words, but to transform our patterns of thought, speech, and behavior according to that which we are praying so that the words truly become our own.

For the remainder of August, I plan on preaching one psalm each Sunday. I will try to preach the psalm so that you will be encouraged to pray the psalms on your own. Perhaps even using the Sunday psalm as a pedal-tone for your own prayers throughout the week.

And, as we countdown the weeks until we can resume worshiping in together, I invite you to join with me in praying the psalms Jesus prayed so that we can continue to learn to walk the way Jesus sends us in dependence on the Holy Spirit whatever awaits in the Fall.

And may God alone be glorified now and forever.

Amen.

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession:

Great and gracious God,
we thank you that you chose to create life with whom to share your life;
we thank you that you have forgiven sin through the sacrifice you offered on the cross,
and are redeeming your good creation in the power of the Holy Spirit.
We thank you that you have created us
to be partners with you in creation and redemption.
We thank you that you have given us your Word, written, translated, and preserved
so that we can learn faithful devotion to you.
And we thank you that you are not a God who remains far off,
but you hear the prayers of your people.

And so now we offer to you our prayers of intercession.

For the world you love.

Hear our prayers.

For those who are suffering because of COVID-19,
for those who are ill, for those whose lives have been transformed.

Hear our prayers.

For those who are recipients of prejudice and those who are perpetrators of prejudice,
Refresh the eyes of the soul
so that people can see each other as beloved images of you,
as images of all that is holy and good.

Hear our prayers

For your church.

Hear our prayers.

For those who are beginning to gather once more and for those who are waiting,
grant us the courage to proclaim your works and your righteousness,
to be true witnesses of your stable and constant grace in a world with so much turmoil.
Hear our prayers.

For those who are near to our hearts at this time.

O Lord, Hear our prayers.

And though we are separated, hear now our united voices as we pray:

Our Father ...

Hymn #398 “When the spirit of the Lord moves in my soul”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UENQsL3s5Ng>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZYrNXZtWw4Y>

Benediction:

As you walk through your day,
may God go before you to lead you,
behind you to protect you,
beneath you to support you,

beside you to befriend you.

Do not be afraid.

May the blessing of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be upon you.

Do not be afraid.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

Amen.