

..... Daily Devotions

May 13-19, 2018
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When I did my undergraduate degree in music, one of my professors would remind students who were having a tough time with a work of Brahms, “You have to have lived at least 40 years to begin to really appreciate Brahms.” I have found the same thing is true with the psalms. Somehow they are more meaningful to me in my old age. I appreciate them more these days. They teach me how to pray, and how to speak with a human heart before God. This week I offer some psalms that sustain me these days.

Sunday, May 13, 2018

Text: Psalm 147:1-6

Praise the Lord! How good it is to sing praises to our God; for he is gracious, and a song of praise is fitting. The Lord builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the outcasts of Israel. He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds. He determines the number of the stars; he gives to all of them their names. Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure. The Lord lifts up the downtrodden; he casts the wicked to the ground.

One of my very favorite hymns is “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty” (858 in the ELW). There is a familiar arrangement of that hymn that St Olaf choirs often sing and it never fails but brings tears to my eyes. Perhaps it is because it is one of those hymns that have survived all the hymnals I have used over the years, or perhaps because the melody is so singable and uplifting. But mostly it is because I cannot sing the verses without getting caught up in the words of praise that rise to God out the voices of the congregation. As many of us look toward our celebrations of Thanksgivings on Thursday, may our prayers of praise rise up to our Creator God with joy and adoration.

Let us pray: *Hear our prayers of praise, O God. Give us grateful hearts for your bountiful goodness and the majesty of your creation. Preserve and keep us and all things in your care; through Jesus Christ. AMEN*



Monday, May 14, 2018

Text: Psalm 49:1-9

Hear this, all you peoples; give ear, all in habitants of the world, both low and high, rich and poor together.

My mouth shall speak wisdom; the meditation of my heart shall be understanding. I will incline my ear to a proverb; I will solve my riddle to the music of the harp.

Why should I fear in times of trouble, when the iniquity of my persecutors surrounds me, those who trust in their wealth and boast of the abundance of their riches?

Truly, no ransom avails for one's life, there is no price one can give to God for it.

For the ransom of life is costly, and can never suffice, that one should live on forever and never see the grave.

The author begins by summoning his readers and asks why one should fear the rich and powerful. Clearly their wealth cannot save them from the Great Equalizer, namely death. We live in a time where there is such a glut of worldly goods in our nation for many and struggles for decent health care and nourishing food for many others, it would be well to remember the words of Jesus, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." (Luke 12:15)

Let us Pray: *Creator God, Lord of all nations, make us wise in our use of the gifts you shower on us and our nation. Keep us from the shallowness of living for things and turn us toward our neighbor in love and living for Jesus. In Christ, AMEN.*



Tuesday, May 15, 2018

Text: Psalm 90: 1-6; 12

Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

You turn us back to dust, and say, "Turn back, you mortals." For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past, or like a watch in the night.

You sweep them away; they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning; in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers.

So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart.

I had been visiting with a hospice patient over several months and she was struggling with learning how to relinquish things that were important to her as she approached the end of life. She and I read psalm 90 together one afternoon and as we considered the words of the psalmist she said it brought her comfort and a sense of gratitude for all the blessings she had been given in her life. The next time I went to visit her she said that she had read that psalm every morning and it helped her come to grips with her human frailty.

Let us Pray: Gracious God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come, Help us to live each day as if it were our last. Give us the grace and wisdom to let go of the things that we can't control anyway, and instead allow us to put the brevity of our lives into an eternal perspective that uplifts and gives us joy. In Jesus' Holy Name, Amen



Wednesday, May 16, 2018

Text: Psalm 138

I will give thanks to you, O Lord, with my whole heart; before the gods I will sing your praise.

I will bow down toward your holy temple and praise your name, because of your love and faithfulness; for you have glorified you name and your word above all things.

When I called, you answered me, you increased my strength within me.

All the kings of the earth will praise you O Lord, when they have heard the words of your mouth.

They will sing of the ways of the Lords, that great is the glory of the Lord.

Though the Lord be high, he cares for the lowly. He perceives the haughty from afar.

Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you keep me safe; you stretch forth your hand against the fury of my enemies; your right hand shall save me.

The Lord will make good his purpose for me; O Lord, your love endures forever; do not abandon the work of your hands.

The scene might be a courtyard before the sanctuary in Jerusalem. Here a grateful man takes the typical ancient posture for prayer by prostrating himself and composes a song of thanksgiving for an answered prayer.

How was the author's life turned around in a way that caused him to sing this hymn to the greatness of the Lord, and what was the prayer that had been answered?

I have been struggling for several years with a deep grief for someone dear to me and every day, sometimes hourly, have petitioned God for help. Recently it seems as though my prayer has been answered in a positive way, but frankly, I'm afraid to allow myself to trust that it is true. This psalm reminds me to have confidence in God and set aside my uncertainty and embrace the possibility of a good outcome.

Let us Pray: Lord God, give us assurance that you hear our pleas for help. And help us to trust you will answer when we call upon you. We give you thanks with our whole heart that you can turn lives around and restore faith in us. Help us in our times of trouble to never forget your eternal love. In Christ, Amen



Thursday, May 17, 2018

Text: Psalm 121

I lift up my eyes to the hills from where is my help to come?

My help comes from the lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

He will not let your foot be moved, and he who watches over you will not fall asleep.

Behold, he who keeps watch over Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep;

The Lord himself watches over you; the Lord is your shade at your right hand, so that the sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon my night.

The Lord shall preserve you from all evil; it is he who shall keep you safe

The Lord shall watch over your going out and your coming in, from this time forth forevermore.

I remember one of my seminary teachers talking about the psalms that are commonly used at funerals and so mentioned the familiar psalm 121. But I also remember him beginning the psalm, "I lift up my eyes to the hills; from where is my help to come?" and then commenting loudly, "It for sure aint coming from the hills!" That got the classes attention. This has been called a pilgrim psalm by some scholars that was sung either on approaching Jerusalem, or more probably used for the dismissal of pilgrims on their homeward journey. But surely these are words of confidence in a God that neither slumbers nor sleeps. Life can at times be an arduous journey and this can be an image of our journey too—all under the protection of the God who made heaven and earth.

Let us Pray: *Lord God, keep us safe in times of danger. We trust in your changeless love for us and that wherever we walk you walk along side. We ask for your protection for our children, for our nation, and for all those who are vulnerable and in need of you to shield them from harm. In Jesus name, AMEN*



Friday, May 18, 2018

Text: Psalm 118:15-20

There are glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous: “The right hand of the Lord does valiantly; the right hand of the Lord is exalted; the right hand of the Lord does valiantly.”

I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the Lord. The Lord has punished me severely, but he did not give me over to death.

Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it.

This was Martin Luther’s favorite psalm throughout his life. The word’s “I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the Lord” were his personal motto. Luther cites this psalm more frequently than any other. We also know it well because during our Easter season each year we sing it together.

It is a thanksgiving liturgy for some king’s victory in ancient times, but it is also a powerful reminder of the victory we have in Christ Jesus, especially in the season of Easter. The psalm ends with the familiar verse, “O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.” As the years march on, and health, memory and friends and family seem more perilous than in days gone by, it is good to rely on this wonderful pronouncement of trust in God’s victory in Jesus, and to give thanks that even though the things of this world will pass away, God love will endure forever.

Let us Pray: *Most loving God, thanks for your love that continues to us throughout our baptized lives. Give hope and courage when we despair, give us grateful hearts to praise you, and give us purposeful and meaningful lives of service to you and our neighbor. In Christ, AMEN*



Saturday, May 19, 2018

Text: Psalm 145:15-16

The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing.

What will be your prayer of thanksgiving be today? When I was little the normal, daily prayer was “Thank you for the world so sweet, thank you for the food we eat, thank you for the birds that sing, thank you God for everything.” My favorite table blessing has always been “Be present at our table Lord” because Lutherans sing that so well!

Many families have a tradition of going around the table and having each person state something that they are grateful for. Instead of the usual “God is great, God is good” sort of blessing, someone often gives heartfelt thanks for much more than the food on the table, but for the people sitting around the table as well. What will be your prayer of thanksgiving today? May God fill your heart and mind with gratitude for more than the food.

Let us pray: *Lord God, we give thanks with a grateful heart for our church, our bishop, our pastors, our neighbors, and our family. Bless and unite our country and give us compassionate hearts so that no one goes hungry and all share in the abundance of our gracious God. In Christ, AMEN*

