



Easter Devotional Activity (7A)

Week of 24 May 2020

Writing Our Own Psalm Prayer

Scripture:

*Sing to God, sing in praise of his name,
extol him who rides on the clouds;
rejoice before him—his name is the Lord.*

*A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows,
is God in his holy dwelling.*

*God sets the lonely in families,
he leads out the prisoners with singing;
but the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land. (Psalm 68:4-6)*

Jesus said to the disciples gathered around him, “‘[Y]ou will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’ When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.’” (Acts 1: 8-11)

Reflection:

“He ascended into heaven. He is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.” With these words each Sunday in worship, we affirm our faith in Christ who, at the completion of his earthly ministry, returned to his rightful place of glory in heaven. The same Jesus who had become God’s love in human form, humbling himself as a servant for the sake of all humanity, was now reclaiming the fullness of his divinity as Lord over heaven and earth. The majestic words of the psalm reflect the laud and honor that are due him. The disciples who witnessed Jesus’ ascension stood in awe, their jaws dropped in wonder. Jesus assures the disciples he will send them the Holy Spirit, to guide and direct them as they continue to bear witness to God’s Kingdom on earth.

The ascension of Jesus marks the transition where Jesus entrusts the disciples (that means us!) with the task of carrying on with the work that he had begun. Christ assures us that he will be back, but in the meantime, there’s work to be done. We are the hands and feet of Christ in the world around us. The Spirit equips us to carry on the work of God’s Kingdom in many ways, including through ongoing and creative practices of prayer.

The book of Psalms is a rich resource of prayers and hymns for the people of God throughout the generations, expressing the vast range of human emotions - whether in praise, fear, joy, anger, love, sorrow, celebration, lament, or otherwise. The psalms offer us a place where we can honestly express our deepest emotions and heartfelt communication, as we experience Christ present with us.

This week's devotional activity invites you to write your own personal Psalm Prayer.

Activity: Write Your Own Psalm Prayer

*This activity can be adapted to be used as either an individual or group devotional activity. It can be completed in stages (over multiple days) or in a single session. Families with children can simplify the activity using a children's Bible translation of psalms.***

Although the contents of the psalms vary widely, as a whole the psalmists express elements of adoration, confession, thanksgiving, lament, trust, and supplication (request) in their prayers. This activity offers some of these same elements, drawing from verses of various psalms.

Step 1: Prayer of Preparation

Begin by settling your mind and thoughts with a few deep breaths. Offer a prayer that invites the presence of the Holy Spirit into this time. Use your own words or consider these from Gregory of Nazianzus (4th century):

“Lord, as I read the psalms let me hear you singing. As I read your words, let me hear you speaking. As I reflect on each page, let me see your image. And as I seek to put your precepts into practice, let my heart be filled with joy.”

Step 2: Read and Reflect

Print out or refer to the attached Psalm verses.

On a blank piece of paper, write out the verses in the first section (Adoration) by hand (*allowing for the head, heart, and hand to connect*). Read slowly and purposefully. Take your time. Read the words again, this time reading aloud. Consider: What is the tone of the words as you hear them? What emotion is being expressed? Pause, and reflect on your own circumstance: How do you connect with the emotions or words being stated? What in your own life or circumstance relates to those feelings? *For example, if the psalm is offering praise to God, in what ways can I also express praise? If the psalm is joy-filled, what in my life is joyful? If the psalm expresses regret, where in my life am I feeling a need to confess?*

Step 3: Write from your heart

Now, write your own verses, letting the theme or emotion of the original psalm verses to guide you. Use your own words. Bring in your own circumstance – be specific. Don't worry about sounding “poetic.” There are no hard and fast rules – you don't have to match the length of the sentence. Let the words flow from your heart as a prayer to God.

Step 4: Continue to read, reflect, write ... and pray

When you're ready, move on to the second set of verses (Confession), using the same process of reading, reflecting, and writing as outlined. Proceed to the third (Thanksgiving) and fourth (Supplication) sets of verses.

When you have finished writing, pray your psalm to God. Reflect and listen: *What has this experience revealed to me about my relationship to God? Has it helped me to feel more free or honest in prayer? How have I felt God's presence in my writing and my praying?*

Step 5: Share Your Psalm Prayer

Christ calls us to be in community with one another. You are encouraged to share this activity with others in your faith circle (family, small group, neighborhood group, friends in faith inside or outside the congregation). Invite other faith friends to do this activity – perhaps by Zoom call or email. Share your finished psalm prayers with one another. Be strengthened by one another and in prayer together.

My Psalm Prayer – Format

Adoration:

Sing to God, sing in praise of his name, extol him who rides on the clouds; rejoice before him—his name is the Lord. A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families, he leads out the prisoners with singing; but the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land. (Psalm 68:4-6)

**Other alternative psalms of adoration to consider: Psalm 103, 104*

Confession:

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, (Psalm 51:1-4)

Thanksgiving:

I will extol you, O Lord, for you have drawn me up, and did not let my foes rejoice over me. O Lord my God, I cried to you for help, and you have healed me. You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, so that my soul may praise you and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you forever. (Psalm 30: 1-2, 11-12)

Supplication:

*Lord, listen to me and answer me. I am poor and helpless.
Give happiness to me, your servant. Lord, I give my life to you.
Lord, you are kind and forgiving. You have great love for those who call to you.
Lord, hear my prayer. Listen when I ask for mercy.
I call to you in times of trouble. You certainly will answer me. (Psalm 86:1,4-7)*

****** The International Children's Bible translation can be accessed for free online. Biblegateway.com is a reliable source site.