

ELCG Devotional Activity

9th Sunday after Pentecost

Week of 2 August 2020

PRAYER AS PRAISE

A recent research study revealed that online searches for prayer resources have increased by more than 50% in the past months of the global pandemic.¹ This has been evidenced in countries around the globe, regardless of religious backgrounds – including even the most secular regions of Northern Europe. In this time of heightened uncertainty or anxiety, many are seeking a deeper connection to the divine through prayer.

Perhaps there is no better resource for prayer than the book of Psalms, which has sustained the people of God for over three thousand years, both in corporate worship and in personal devotion. With language that is honest and heartfelt, the psalms express the depth of emotions, whether they be of lament, thanksgiving, fear, anger, sorrow, or praise.

Woven throughout Sunday's worship were words of praise to God from Psalm 145:
"The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love."

This week's devotional is an invitation to explore creative ways of incorporating Praise into our prayer time.



Scripture

*The Lord is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
The Lord is good to all,
and God's compassion is over all that God has made.
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.*

¹ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/climate-and-people/pandemic-prompts-surge-interest-prayer-google-data-show/>

*God is just in all God's ways,
and kind in all God's doings.
God is near to all who call,
to all who call on God in truth.
God fulfills the desire of all who fear God;
God also hears their cry, and saves them.
God watches over all who love God,
but all the wicked God will destroy.
My mouth will speak the praise of the Lord,
and all flesh will bless God's holy name forever and ever.
(Psalm 145:8-9, 15-22)*

Reflection

This is a much-loved psalm of both the Jewish and Christian traditions, with the joy of God's grace and mercy beautifully reflected throughout its verses. Its emphasis is on the greatness and graciousness of God. Psalm 145 is an acrostic – or alphabet psalm – meaning that each line offers a separate reason for praising God, beginning with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Notice how many times the word “all” or “every” appears: “...*the Lord is good to **all**...*,” “...*God is just in **all** God's ways...*,” “*God is near to **all** who call...*,” for example. It is a psalm that becomes a comprehensive expression of prayer for all occasions when one experiences God's grace in their life.

In his *Reflections on the Psalms*, CS Lewis makes the observation that humans praise “whatever they value, so they spontaneously urge us to join them in praising it: ‘Isn't she lovely? Wasn't it glorious? Don't you think that magnificent?’” Thus, in telling everyone to praise God, the Psalmist is doing what all of us do when we speak of what we care about:

“We delight to praise what we enjoy, because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete till it is expressed.”

In his book, *Wishful Thinking*, theologian Frederick Buechner describes how the whole of God's creation is “in on the act” of praising God:

“... the sun and moon, the sea, fire and snow, Holstein cows and white-throated sparrows, old men in walkers and children who still haven't taken their first step. Their praise is not chiefly a matter of saying anything, because most of creation doesn't deal in words. Instead, the snow whirls, the fire roars, the Holstein bellows, the old man watches the moon rise. Their praise is not something that at their most complimentary they say, but something that at their truest they are.

“We learn to praise God not by paying compliments, but by paying attention. Watch how the trees exult when the wind is in them. Mark the utter stillness of the great blue heron in the swamp. Listen to the sound of the rain. Learn how to say “Hallelujah” from the ones who say it right.”

Questions for Reflection

What is the difference between giving Thanks to God and giving Praise to God? How are they intertwined? Why are both important?

How often do I stop to “pay attention” to the signs of God’s presence in the world around me? How often do I take the time to offer up words of praise to God for God’s greatness and graciousness?

*At what times – or in what circumstances – do I find it easy to praise God?
What makes it difficult for me to praise God?*

How does offering praise to God help me keep my life “in perspective” and aware of God’s presence and grace? Does it help me to be more grateful? More grace-filled?

Activity Suggestions

CS Lewis speaks about praise as delight for one’s beloved that is incomplete unless it is expressed. Consider any of these ways to express your love for and praise for God:

- * Write a love letter to God, expressing your love for God’s grace and presence in your life.
- * If you are artistically inclined, make a drawing that expresses your love for God.
- * Make your own acrostic praise poem. Choose your favorite name for God (such as “Abba,” “Lord,” “Yahweh,” etc), and write the letters down the side of a piece of paper. Use each starting letter to create a word or phrase of praise to God.
- * Sing a song of praise as part of your daily devotional. One great example from our weekly worship is “Tout Est Fait.”

Abel Nkuinki: Cameroon

1. Tout est fait pour la gloi - re de Dieu. A - men. A - men.
2. La vie c'est pour la gloi - re de Dieu. A - men.
3. Le culte est pour la gloi - re de Dieu. A - men.

Tout dé - pend de ce que tu en fais. A - men. A - men. A - men. A - men. A -

men. 1. Tout est fait pour la gloi - re de Dieu, A - men. A - men.
2. La vie c'est
3. Le culte est

- * Take a walk. Pay attention to God’s creative beauty that is around you. Be still, and experience the sights, sounds, smells. Allow yourself to be “wowed” by God’s presence in creation. As you continue on your walk, consider other ways that God has been present with you during the past week – in relationships, through prayer, new experiences or insights, etc., and offer up praise.

Prayer

O Lord, you are worthy of all praise! Indeed, you are gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. Your goodness knows no limit, and your faithfulness is without bounds. With each new day, may your Spirit guide and inspire my thoughts and actions, that my life may be an offering of praise to you. In the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.