

+ Midweek Advent 2 + Sermon preached by Pastor Curt S. Backhaus
December 12, 2018. St. Paul Lutheran (WELS), Tomah WI

Last Wednesday, we were introduced to Psalm 119 --this great poem praising God for his Word. We learned how the Christian discipline of meditation helps us get ready for Christ's coming. Meditating on God's Word and on Christ's work of saving sinners like you and me makes a real difference in our faith and in our life.

This evening we consider another portion of Psalm 119 and another great Christian discipline, namely prayer. As we'll see, meditation and prayer go hand-in-hand.

Psalm 119:145-152 | EHV

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I call with all my heart. Answer me, O Lord.

I will guard your statutes.

I call to you. Save me,

and I will keep your testimonies.

I get up before dawn, and I cry for help.

I wait confidently for your word.

My eyes look forward to the night watches

when I can meditate on your sayings.

Hear my voice according to your mercy.

Lord, give me life based on your judgments.

Those who pursue evil plans are near,

but they are far from your law.

You are near, O Lord,

and all your commandments are truth.

Long ago I knew from your testimonies

that you established them to endure forever.

The psalmist begins with a great definition for prayer. Prayer is calling to God, "speaking to God from the heart."

With God, conversation is a two-way street.

First, God speaks to us in his Word. In the Bible, God pours out his heart to us. He reassures us of his love and forgiveness in Christ Jesus. We read, learn and take to heart what God tells us.

As confessional Lutherans, we're pretty good at that. We make sure our worship services are full of Bible readings. The songs we sing and the litanies and prayers that we recite all flow right from the Scriptures. From little on, we have memorized all kinds of Bible passages and Scripture truths. And if a preacher or teacher would dare to share anything that doesn't line up exactly with God's Word, we'd show him the door, right?

But the conversation doesn't end right there. Next is our turn to speak. As you prepare for

Christ's coming, remember and rededicate yourself to the practice of prayer. What a special privilege to be able to pray –to call out to God anywhere and anytime and know that he will hear and answer us!

That's what the psalmist encourages us to do: "I get up before dawn, and I cry for help." Start every day with prayer. Thank God for protecting you throughout the night and for giving you rest. Ask him to keep you safe from all harm and danger and direct you during the day. Ask God to bless your work, to guide your thoughts, words and actions according to his Word, so that everything you say and do serves your neighbor and glorifies your Savior.

And then close your day with prayer, too. "My eyes look forward to the night watches when I can meditate on your sayings," the psalmist writes. "Hear my voice according to your mercy. Lord, give me life based on your judgments." Remember God's promises in Christ and all of his blessings during the day now coming to a close. Ask for God's mercy and forgiveness for anything you've done wrong. Then place into his mighty hands and loving care your unfinished tasks, your unsolved problems and your unfulfilled hopes, knowing that he holds the future. "Cast all your cares on him, because he cares for you." Commit everything and everyone to his love and protection. Say, "Amen!" And then, get a good night's sleep.

So, you start your day with prayer. You end your day with prayer. And anytime and every time in-between, just keep the conversation going. Pray anytime. Anywhere. For anything and everything. For anyone and everyone. Be persistent and constant in prayer.

Put into practice that wonderful privilege that is all yours, thanks to Jesus.

You see, if the Christ had not come at Christmastime, and then if he had not come into our hearts by faith, we wouldn't be able to pray. God wouldn't hear us.

Remember what the world was like without Christ? What your life was like without Jesus? Remember what God said through Isaiah, "Your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear" (Isaiah 59:2). We didn't have a prayer!

But then Jesus came! "To us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6).

That's why our psalmist can say, "You are near, O Lord." God himself came in human flesh to live and die for us, to reconcile and reconnect us to our God. Jesus is near to us, always near and dear, ready to hear, as we pray in his name. And he's almighty, all-loving, always wanting to hear from us and completely willing to intercede for us and answer our prayers. All because of his merits and worthiness. All for our eternal good. And, all for his glory.

As you prepare your hearts and lives for Christ to come again, devote yourself to God's Word and be fervent in prayer as you remember these words from Philippians 4:5-7, "The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Amen.