

MONDAY, 1/6

Read Psalm 27:4

*⁴One thing I ask from the LORD this only do I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life,
to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple.*

Sunday's sermon centered on this statement by Jesus in Matthew 21:13: "(God's) house shall be called a house of prayer." Our focus for the season of Lent, which begins on Wednesday, is to become a house of prayer, a church that seeks God's heart and desires.

Psalm 27 provides a vision of what it means to become a "house of prayer". In this verse, David expresses the one thing he seeks: to dwell in the Lord's presence. His greatest desire is to enjoy the beauty of God and to seek after Him.

I wonder what your greatest desires are. I wonder where the Lord fits in those desires. Be honest with yourself.

If you're entering this Lenten season with God being somewhere other than at the top position on the list of things you desire, do not despair. I appreciate your honesty. Perhaps the first step toward moving God into that position is seeking Him in prayer. It's carving the time to enjoy Him and chase after Him. There's something about being in His presence that makes you desire more of Him.

Sending prayer:

"God, as I prepare to observe this season of Lent, stir within me a desire to know You more. Give me a passion to enjoy You and to seek Your face. Meet me in my time of prayers. Even when I do not feel Your presence, I trust that You are near. Thank You for loving me far more than it is possible for me to love You. I want to experience the power of Your love anew in this season. Amen."

TUESDAY, 1/7

Read Psalm 139

¹You have searched me, LORD, and you know me.

²You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.

³You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.

⁴Before a word is on my tongue you, LORD, know it completely.

⁵You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me.

⁶Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.

⁷Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?

⁸If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

⁹If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, ¹⁰even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

¹¹If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," ¹²even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.

¹³For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.

¹⁴I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

¹⁵My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.

¹⁶Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

¹⁷ How precious to me are your thoughts,^[a] God! How vast is the sum of them!

¹⁸ Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand—when I awake, I am still with you.

¹⁹ If only you, God, would slay the wicked! Away from me, you who are bloodthirsty!

²⁰ They speak of you with evil intent; your adversaries misuse your name.

²¹ Do I not hate those who hate you, LORD, and abhor those who are in rebellion against you?

²² I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies.

²³ Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.

²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

The truths that are drawn out in this psalm are simple yet profound.

The Lord knows you; in fact, He knows you better than you know yourself. He knew you before you even saw the light of day. He knit you together in your mother's womb, and there isn't one part of you that surprises Him. He was the first to lay eyes on you.

The psalmist also considers if there is a place we can go where God is not. Can we hide from God? It doesn't appear to be the case. David said, "If I go up to the heaven...make my bed in the depths...rise on the wings of the dawn...settle on the far side of the sea, even there You will guide me."

David concludes the psalm by inviting God, who knows us and is ever before us, to examine his heart. He says, "Search me, God, know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting." I can think of no better invitation to extend God as we prepare to enter the season of Lent.

While the thought of asking God to look into the depths of our souls can be intimidating, let us be reminded that nothing is hidden from Him, even the things we so foolishly think we can hide from Him. Let us also remember that God's desire isn't to shame us but to lead us in the way everlasting. So let us pray with confidence along with David, "Search me and know my heart, O God."

Sending prayer:

"God, I want You to examine my heart. I pray You reveal what's inside me so that I can bring any brokenness to the throne of grace and find healing. I want to be fully known by You because I want to know You more fully. I want my life to honor You in every way and for nothing to impede a deeper life with You. So in this Lenten season, take me on a journey that I may walk in the joy of knowing You. Amen."

WEDNESDAY, 1/8

Read Psalm 1

¹ Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers,

² but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night.

³ That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers.

⁴ Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away.

⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

⁶ For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.

The book of Psalms provides us an opportunity to expand your vocabulary for prayer and the depth in which you pray, then look to the Psalms.

This week we will be reading through psalms and then practice praying them. By that, I mean that we will use the images, words, and structure of the psalm to build our own prayer. You can do this many different ways. Sometimes it's easier than others, yet it is an important practice. We want to allow scripture to shape what we pray about as well as how we pray. So let's dive in.

Psalms tell us about the truly blessed life. "Blessed" means "happy" in Hebrew, although this idea of happiness is more than a fleeting emotion but rather a sense of deep, abiding joy. It also speaks of the whole life. Notice verse 1 mentions sitting, walking, and standing, which sums up nearly all of our activity. The deeply happy person is the one for whom God's Word is at the center of his or her life. It captures their desire (delight) and their mind (meditate). The Word so influences their lives that it bears fruit and sustains them throughout dry seasons. I can't think of a better psalm to begin praying as we begin Lent. Let's pray this psalm together.

Praying the Psalm:

"Lord, the blessed life is experienced by those who delight in Your Word and who dwell on it, allowing it to shape their life. When Your Word is always before us, our lives become like a tree planted by streams of water, always growing and producing fruit. Lord, I long for this kind of life. I want Your Word to be on my heart. I want You to teach me through it and for Your Spirit to transform me from the inside out. I don't want to walk in the ways of those who don't know You. You have such wonders in store for me through knowing You more fully. Lead me in the ways You would have me go. Amen."

THURSDAY, 1/9

Read Psalm 4

¹Answer me when I call to you, my righteous God.

Give me relief from my distress; have mercy on me and hear my prayer.

²How long will you people turn my glory into shame? How long will you love delusions and seek false gods?

³Know that the LORD has set apart his faithful servant for himself; the LORD hears when I call to him.

⁴Tremble and ^[a]do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent.

⁵Offer the sacrifices of the righteous and trust in the LORD.

⁶Many, LORD, are asking, "Who will bring us prosperity?" Let the light of your face shine on us.

⁷Fill my heart with joy when their grain and new wine abound.

⁸In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, LORD, make me dwell in safety.

As we pray our way through the psalms, you will notice that they will lead us to pray all kinds of prayers. Today is a good example. While yesterday in Psalm 1, we asked God to lead us to the blessed life, today in Psalm 4 we are going to lament. A lament is a cry out to God.

The psalm is urgent. David needs God to hear His prayer. David also prays, trusting that God will hear him. David calls God "my righteous God". Righteousness is a relational term, and in this instance, means that God acts rightly in relationship. David trusts the Lord, which is precisely why he finishes the psalm as he does. Verse 8 reads, "In peace I will lie down and sleep, for You alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety." The prayer that begins with urgency ends in peace. Why? It is because David lays his request before a faithful and dependable God who acts in the lives of those He loves.

I wonder what urgent requests you have to bring before the Lord.

I wonder what it looks like to pray diligently while trusting Him completely so that you too can experience peace and rest.

Praying the Psalm:

"Jesus, You answer me when I cry out to You. I can always depend on You because You bring relief in my distress. I trust that You have mercy and hear me when I pray to You. Just as David was plagued by great concerns, so I too feel the same in my heart. I want to lay these things before You now. (Take time to pray for the urgent prayer requests on your heart). Lord, I know that You are good. You are able to give the gift of peace even when I feel things as heavy as grief or fear. Grant rest to my soul as I consider Your loving care for You alone allow me to dwell in safety. Amen."

FRIDAY, 1/10

Read through Psalm 6

¹*LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath.*

²*Have mercy on me, LORD, for I am faint, heal me, LORD, for my bones are in agony.*

³*My soul is in deep anguish. How long, LORD, how long?*

⁴*Turn, LORD, and deliver me; save me because of your unfailing love.*

⁵*Among the dead no one proclaims your name. Who praises you from the grave?*

⁶*I am worn out from my groaning. All night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears.*

⁷*My eyes grow weak with sorrow; they fail because of all my foes.*

⁸*Away from me, all you who do evil, for the LORD has heard my weeping.*

⁹*The LORD has heard my cry for mercy; the LORD accepts my prayer.*

¹⁰*All my enemies will be overwhelmed with shame and anguish; they will turn back and suddenly be put to shame.*

This psalm is a request for healing. Whether it is a sickness, a disabling condition, a devastating loss, or living with the consequences of sin, the psalmist describes the agony of suffering amidst his circumstances. No matter what kind of healing is needed, the psalmist admits to feeling weak and in deep anguish, feelings that separate him from God. He begs for mercy and deliverance, knowing that he can't tolerate being apart from God. He trusts that God will relieve him from his suffering.

The psalmist begins praising God, who, he believes, will heal his suffering, noting that it is God's unfailing love that will save him. The psalmist is worn out by his flood of tears and believes that his suffering will be met with unfailing love. He believes God will hear him and accept his prayer. He celebrates that his enemies, including the cause of his suffering, will turn away from him. God is bigger than anything we could do or say. We can be forgiven for any and every sin, as long as we are willing to repent.

When you read this psalm, what ailment, condition, or sin is represented here for you? When do you feel most separated from God? How do you pray to heal your own suffering?

Praying the Psalm:

"Lord, my God, You are the Great Physician. You bring life into this world and You provide healing when I feel broken by illness, loss, and sin. Though sometimes I feel all alone in my suffering, I know that Your Presence is always with me. Please, Lord, show me a new way to live with You at the forefront. For so long I have cried out for You, knowing that Your loving heart would remain open for my return. And though I feel separated from You at times, You keep Your promises to Your people. I know that I can count on Your healing touch to soothe my pain and forgive my sins. I know that no matter how much I hurt or sin, You always make a place for me with You. Show me how to honor You with all that I do and say. In Jesus' name. Amen."

SATURDAY, 1/11

Read Psalm 8

¹ *LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!*

You have set your glory in the heavens.

² *Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.*

³ *When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,*

⁴ *what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?*

⁵ *You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor.*

⁶ *You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their^[a] feet:*

⁷ *all flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild,*

⁸ *the birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.*

⁹ *LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!*

This is a psalm of praise for creation and humanity's role within it. The psalmist marvels that God is a household name, one that is celebrated among the youngest of us. The innocent babble of children easily drowns out the voice of doubt and disbelief. God hand made the beauty of the skies, decorating it with the moon and stars that light the sky at night. The psalmist seems both grateful and amazed that God pays attention to us. Out of all the things He created, why does God put us in charge?

We have been blessed with dominion over God's created world, including the air we breathe, the animals in the field, the birds of the air, the fish in the sea, and all other creatures that swim in its depths. He ends the psalm by praising God and His creation.

I wonder what part of creation stands out to you most. How often do you take the time to marvel at the God that created all things?

Praying the Psalm:

"Dearest Sovereign Lord, You have made a place for me in your kingdom. I am unable to fathom the breadth and depth of all that You created, and yet You have placed the responsibility for Your created world with me. As I marvel at what is above, beside, and below me, I stand amazed at Your Presence within it all. How did I earn this privilege? May I always be mindful of the power I have been given. May I always look to You first before I act, realizing that I am the one representing Your guiding hand in this world. It is with the greatest humility that I serve as Your representative. Amen."

SUNDAY, 1/12

Read Psalm 11

¹ *In the LORD I take refuge. How then can you say to me: "Flee like a bird to your mountain.*

² *For look, the wicked bend their bows; they set their arrows against the strings to shoot from the shadows at the upright in heart.*

³ *When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?"*

⁴ *The LORD is in his holy temple, the LORD is on his heavenly throne. He observes everyone on earth; his eyes examine them.*

⁵ *The LORD examines the righteous, but the wicked, those who love violence, he hates with a passion.*

⁶ *On the wicked he will rain fiery coals and burning sulfur, a scorching wind will be their lot.*

⁷ *For the LORD is righteous, he loves justice, the upright will see his face.*

This psalm is considered one of trust in the face of danger. It calls for the confrontation of God's enemies. Dr. J. Clinton McCann summarizes the psalm best by saying that faced by hostile powers that made the situation seem hopeless, the psalmist professes faith in God's rule and lives out of the hope that God's rule will be fully manifested. When it least appears that God's power will prevail, the psalmist proclaims God's reign, and he chooses not flight, but faith.

There are moments in this world when we may feel like everything is falling apart. Though we may be tempted to do what the psalmist was initially told to do (give up), we have been called as faithful disciples to take refuge in God first. We are reminded that in the midst of our hardest challenges, God is fully present and observes all that happens in the world. Those He deems wicked, He will punish, and those who are upright will one day see His face.

How many times have you moved through hard times and forgot to invite God into them? How long after a difficult moment will you wait before going to God in prayer?

Praying the Psalm:

"My Lord, I will not flee when faced with difficult challenges. I will stand my ground with You at my side and allow my faith to guide me. It is so easy to give up the fight, but we are called to a higher standard. There is nothing in this world that we cannot face as long as You are by our side. No matter how hard things become, remind me that my faith is my first line of defense against my enemies. Through You, Lord, I can fight the good fight. Through You, I can find justice. In Jesus' name. Amen."