**Psalm 25:1-7** March 11, 2018

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Lent 4

*1To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul;*

*2in you I trust, O my God.*

*Do not let me be put to shame,*

*nor let my enemies triumph over me.*

*3No one whose hope is in you*

*will ever be put to shame,*

*but they will be put to shame*

*who are treacherous without excuse.*

*4Show me your ways, O Lord,*

*teach me your paths;*

*5guide me in your truth and teach me,*

*for you are God my Savior,*

*and my hope is in you all day long.*

*6Remember, O Lord, your great mercy and love,*

*for they are from of old.*

*7Remember not the sins of my youth*

*and my rebellious ways;*

*according to your love remember me,*

*for you are good, O Lord.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**Praying from the Heart *OR*  
What I Want God to Remember & What I Want God to Forget**

There was a lady, a member of a church, who was talking to a friend. I just so happened to be there when she was inviting her friend to come to a Sunday service. Part of her invitation included, “And don’t mind the pastor when he turns his back on you in the service. It’s just how Lutherans worship.” If you don’t come from a Lutheran, or maybe Catholic or Episcopal background, we do seem to worship in kind of funny way compared to church services that you see on TV. We follow a liturgy. *A lot* of churches don’t.

A liturgy does a lot of things, but one I want to think about is this: Liturgy is meant to be interactive worship. God speaks, we respond. We listen, then we speak or sing. A liturgical service is not entertainment, it is a conversation between us and God.

Part of our part of the conversation is singing hymns. We love hymns, because in hymns we get to speak to God. Most of us can repeat more lines from hymns than we can passages from the Bible. And that is not a bad thing. Hymns are where we get to tell God what is on our hearts.

Psalms are like hymns. Most of the 66 books of the Bible is God talking to us. Psalms is mostly us talking to God. In Psalms, God led different Old Testament believers to speak divinely inspired words which are mostly words going this direction, from us to God.

Psalms are very much like songs in another way. On the radio, most popular songs fit a few general themes. You have love songs, sad songs, happy songs, tell-em-off songs, and one or two other varieties. In the book of Psalms most of the 150 psalms can be grouped into just a few themes. One of those recurring themes that part of today’s psalm is: “The prayer of a believer in a an unbelieving world.” You know what that’s like, right?

**I. Praying, Weighed Down with Shame**

This last week, sitting in a waiting room waiting for a tire change, I saw a daytime TV show I don’t see but two or three times in a year—usually in waiting rooms. Dr. Phil was talking about a recent presidential advisor who stepped down, and said something like, “I wouldn’t worry about the president, but I would worry about the vice-president because he is a Christian.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Now Dr. Phil made it pretty clear in his leading questions that he sort of agrees. “Beware of the vice president! Not because of the political views he has, but because he is a Christian.”

Really?! The host of the highest rated TV talk show in the nation, a man who is careful to not say anything he doesn’t mean, apparently just said that serious Christians in power are a questionable lot. I had to do a mental double take. I found it hard to believe I had just heard that. I probably shouldn’t have been.

Apparently we are strange people with strange views, who are fine as long as we keep it between us and God, or between us and like-minded people within the confines of a church. But we ought not be trusted anywhere beyond that! Indeed, we are believers in an unbelieving world.

That is what the writer of this psalm faced. He was surrounded by people who wanted to shame him for his core beliefs. And so he prays, ***“O Lord, do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me.”*** Lord, don’t let me look like a fool; don’t let unbelievers be all smug and self-satisfied in their unbelief.

We know the truth about God. We like to think that we don’t care what other people think. But we do. And when lots or most people look down their noses at us, it bothers us. Infact, though we don’t want to admit this, it hurts.

Shame hurts. Just ask the kid who goes out to the restaurant with the team after a game. He has to buy one cheeseburger with water when everyone else is getting BigMacs and large Cokes. Ouch.

Shame is society’s way of relegating certain people or behaviors without having to go through all the bother of a court case. And of late, we have gotten pretty good at shaming. Just get the majority, or a very vocal minority, of people to decide that a certain viewpoint is unacceptable, and suddenly the people with that viewpoint are running for cover. Doesn’t matter if that is what all humanity for millenia has believed it, now you are a dunce. No court case, usually not even facts. You just find that suddenly public opinion is against you. You can either continue on with the burden of public shame, or say, “It’s not worth it” and surrender your beliefs.

Instead of surrendering to shame, the believer of Psalm 25 cries out, ***“To you, O Lord, I lift my soul.”*** He feels the shame heaped on him. He knows what it is to have people snicker at him, to hear the snide comments. But he knows there is someone else. There is someone more powerful, someone whose opinion he values more than all the people of the world. So he puts his life in the hands of the Lord. If he could, he would lift himself up and drop himself in the protecting hands of God the Father.

His prayer begins, ***“To you, O Lord, I lift my soul.”***

**II. Praying that We Will not Be Shamed**

Jesus repeatedly told his disciples that the world would try to shame them. He told them repeatedly because he knew that they and we are not immune to the hurt of shame. We feel it. We long for acceptance. Our hearts hurt when people mock us, even when we are sure we are right. Oh, at first we can be confident in our principles. But let them work on us. Get laughed at a few times. Find out what they really think and we might come around to seeing it their way.

Instead, pray. Take it to the Lord. Psalm 25 prays what the believer feels in the heart. Verse two prays, ***“Do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me.*** Lord, make me immune to their insults. Better yet prove to them that I have not believed a lie, that in fact my faith in you is something strong and beautiful and true.”

Verse two was a request, ***“Do not let me be put to shame.”*** Verse three is no longer a request, but a statement of fact, ***“No one whose hope is in you will ever be put to shame, but they will be put to shame who are treacherous.”*** Prayer is a march from hope to certainty, certainty that God hears. As we pray, we go from hope to certainty. Does prayer not work that way? Prayer calms a worried heart by letting the Lord handle the world’s opposition.

All the world may shame us believers. And if we had a perfect faith, the world’s shame would bounce off us like arrows off tank armor. But we do not yet have that perfect faith in God. So we ask God to continually shore up our flagging spirits: ***“Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me.”***

Prayer is our ongoing response to what the world throws at us. Prayer is certainty that the God we claim is there, that he will do all he has promised, and that he continues to have answers even for 21st century life.

**III. Hear This Prayer, Lord, because of Who You Are**

But in the last two verses something happens. All the confidence the psalmist felt is shaken. Asking a perfect God to answer our prayers is a half-baked idea.

As parents, we obviously need to know when kids will be at home, and when they won’t. One of our kids works a few nights a week. But his work schedule frequently changes. Sometimes he has something he needs to do on a given day, so he asks someone else to cover his shift. And vice versa, someone can ask him to cover their shift, and if he can, he is kind of obligated to help because they have hepled him. There is a lot of back-scratching going on there; you help me, I’ll help you.

You can’t do that with God. We never have the right to “call in a favor” from God. We have never lent to God. We will never help God out of a predicament. And the psamlist knows it. He knows that his pleas for help are half baked. We can ask, but if it comes to a meritocracy, we can’t *expect* anything from God.

Many times in the Bible, you can read of God’s people who prayed, and then realized, “But who am I to pray to God?” And maybe you have prayed, and then thought, “But wait a minute, there are a thousand reasons God shouldn’t answer me. I have shirked my duties. I have been selfish. I have my bad habits. I have promised things I didn’t do. There is one person I still have trouble forgiving… My God has never failed me, but I *still* fail him!”

So in verses 6 and 7 we have one of the most touching prayers in the book of Psalms: ***“Remember, O Lord, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old. Remember not the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you are good, O Lord”*** (6-7). He begs God to remember certain things and to forget other things.

“Lord, don’t remember who I am. ***Remember not the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways”*** is a request that God do something scandalous. It is a request that God *not* treat the guilty as they deserve to be treated.

“Dear God, don’t remember who I really am. Don’t open that book. Don’t run me through the details. I know all about it. It hurts and it is shameful. My younger years were nothing to be proud of. And though I have aged, I still have my rebellions. Just that now I am better at keeping them hidden. Don’t remember, dear God. Instead, ***Remember, O Lord, your great mercy and love… according to your love remember me, for you are good, O Lord.*** Hear my prayer not because of me but because you are compassionate, faithful, loving and good.”

Of course, Old Testament believers like the original Psalmist only had a shadow of the Savior in sacrificial sheep and cattle. But he was looking forward to another sacrifice for sin. We, however, know just how a holy God can also be a compassionate and forgiving God. That mystery of a holy and loving God is resolved in the cross of Jesus. For what happened there proves that God is both holy and forgiving. Sin’s punishment was carried out. God’s holiness was upheld. And God could therefore forgive sins without condoning sin.

Therefore we have reasons to pray the prayer of Psalm 25, “Think of me, heavenly Father, when the world heaps its shame on me. Look at me like that father looked on his prodigal son. Have mercy. Be compassionate. I do not deserve your favor, yet I claim a place in your house, under your protection, because of your Son Jesus. Preserve me from shame, and instead let the world see the emptiness of their ways, that they too may glorify you.” Amen.

1. Not a direct quote, but an approximate remembrance. Interview between Dr. Phil and Anthony Scaramucci about Omorosa quotation, March 6, 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)