

Truthful Speech as Common Prayer

Session One: *Getting a Handle on the Psalms*

As Anglicans, the Psalms are at the core of our common prayer life, but it can be difficult to enter them fully as prayer when the world they emerged from is so different from our own. In order to bridge this gap, we often select psalms that are more immediately accessible and pleasant (e.g. **Psalm 23**) but avoid those that present difficulties to our modern sensibilities. For example, the more shocking psalms (e.g. **Psalms 88** and **137**) confound us with their raw emotion and curses wished upon enemies. But it is by learning to engage the entire Psalter as prayer that we will grow not only in our prayer lives but also as “fully alive” human beings, formed more and more into Christ’s likeness.

1. What stood out to you in session one? How did it change the way you think and feel about the Psalms? How has praying through the Psalter each 6 weeks with our psalms group changed your relationship with the Psalms?
2. Eugene Peterson writes that those who wish to use the Psalms as a way to train themselves in prayer must do so “with the same attitude and the same reason gardeners gather up rake and hoe on their way to the vegetable patch... It’s simply a matter of practicality-acquiring the tools for the human work at hand.” What does this quotation mean to you? How can it help you use the Psalms more effectively as prayer?
3. Discuss what it means when Old Testament scholar Ellen Davis claims that the Psalms “enable us to bring to conversation with God feelings and thoughts that most of us think we need to get rid of before God will be interested in hearing from us.” How does this challenge you and/or comfort you when it comes to your prayer life and learning to pray the psalms?
4. Jesus knew and undoubtedly prayed the psalms, and as this lesson claims, was the most “fully alive” human history has known. How does the fact that he consistently encountered conflict and enemies challenge your understanding of what it means to be “fully alive” or blessed?
5. What has been or is the greatest challenge in applying the teaching from lesson one? What is one practical step you can take now, summer 2021, to face and overcome this challenge?

Session Two: *Trusting the Process*

The psalms of wisdom most often do not address God. They instead follow the form of other wisdom literature found in the Old Testament (especially Proverbs), providing teaching about the way of wisdom and righteousness set in contrast to the way of foolishness and wickedness. So why are they in the Psalter? How

can we pray them? Building on the idea that prayer is, first of all, formative not expressive—that is, we are given prayers to shape our response to God—the psalms of wisdom provide an essential foundation for God’s people, a “givenness to be relied on.” There is such a thing as *blessedness*, and it is promised to those who “trust the process” by waiting on the Lord.

Wisdom psalms are meditations on the good life, the blessings of living the wise way of life of dependence on God as opposed to the way of destruction which the foolish live who rely on themselves to work out their own destiny. (Examples: **Psalms 37, 49, and 73**)

Closely related to *wisdom psalms* are several psalms that extol the *torah* of God as the medium through which the will of God is known and which is the basis for true wisdom and blessedness. (**Psalms 1, 19:7-14, and 119**) *Torah* is the Hebrew word that refers to the history of God’s actions to redeem people and to God’s instructions that shape the lifestyle of the redeemed. We have *torah* in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. The wise person humbly acknowledges human dependence on God and seeks to know God’s will through immersion in God’s teaching and way of living.

1. Read **Psalm 1**. Consider the imagery used to describe the righteous and the wicked. How does it help you grasp the wisdom of righteousness and the folly of the wicked?
2. We sometimes have a superficial understanding of what it means to live wisely (for example, making good financial plans). Though making plans, financial and otherwise, is a kind of wisdom, the wisdom psalms are concerned with something more fundamental. What is that more fundamental thing? How do we stay focused on it when our schedules are full and life is so busy?
3. Wisdom as it’s presented in the Old Testament and Psalms is rooted in the fear of the Lord, but comes to fruition in love for neighbor. **Psalm 1** jolts us to attention with its emphasis on the two “ways” (i.e. deliberately chosen paths that we consistently move along toward an idea of blessedness). Why do you think **Psalm 1** was placed at the beginning of the Psalter? How does it provide an entryway into the entire collection of psalms?
4. Eugene Peterson calls **Psalm 1** “pre-prayer” because it clears the way and makes us adequate for prayer. All of us need help getting ready to pray since in our day-to-day lives, our hearts and minds are bombarded by doubts, fears, ego, and problems. We’re formed by our daily existence to find a bargain, worry over what will happen with this or that event or relationship, or be distracted by an endless array of media and diversions—and not engage in wonder, awe, and sabbath. How does **Psalm 1** and “trusting the process” prepare us for prayer?