

Praying Daily

Psalm 32

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One of my favourite websites is Aeon: A World of Ideas, where scholars post accessible articles in a wide variety of fields, including my own, philosophy. Back in January an article was posted entitled “Daily Grace” about the importance of daily rituals. That was fortuitous, because at the time I was already planning this Lenten season of worship, wherein we have focused on the spirituality of our daily lives.

The article, by Jay Griffiths, begins by describing her encounter with a particular daily ritual in Bali, where women create offerings called *canang sari* out of coconut leaves, flowers, and prayer and that these offerings are left all over the place, depending on what the prayer is about. Griffiths writes that in Bali, she was “was wonderstruck by the ubiquity of ritual.”

Her experience in Bali compelled her to consider the daily rituals that appear in various cultures, such that she concluded, “Tiny, everyday rituals are a hand-crafted prayer to domestic order, beckoning the divine to step inside a moment.”

When we began Lent three weeks ago, I invited you to join in a sojourn—a rest from the busyness of our lives. But instead of going on a retreat, we were going to take this rest in the midst of our ordinary lives. One way I invited you to do that was to be attentive to the ways you connect to God every day. What is the spirituality you discover in your daily routines?

I hope that by now you’ve paid attention and identified some of these.

Maybe some of them are daily rituals you perform. According to Jay Griffiths, these daily rituals help to create an internal order before we face the stresses of the day. She writes, “Rituals work – even for people who say they do not believe in them. Rituals alleviate grief, reduce anxiety and increase confidence. Rituals also aid self-control.”

Part of what impresses Griffiths so is that something as little and apparently slight as our daily rituals—a thank you, giving flowers, cooking rice—can hold such spiritual and psychological weight.

She concludes her article:

The sweet paradox of small daily rituals is that the ordinary is intensified into the sacred through the numinousness of the absolutely commonplace, an illustration of immanent divinity, demonstrating that all it takes to find cascades of enchantment is a tender attention in which the natural living world is blessed by the psyche, and the psyche by the natural world. Ritual sculpts, shapes and polishes the spirit in a fineness of mind, the hearth of the heart tended and made more tender by the delicate touch of something little more than a thank you. So the slightest of ritual magic, turning on a

breath, might open doorways on to a future; and life might be protected by a petal and the holiness of prayers.

Tender attention to the living world, even in these small ways, might be powerful enough to enchant us, fill our lives with beauty and wonder, and bring order to our chaos.

Today's psalm proclaims that happiness and joy come to those who pray.

In times of distress, described by this psalm as "the rush of mighty waters," we reach out to God in prayer trusting that God is our protector, preserving us from trouble and surrounding us with "glad cries of deliverance."

How do we pray to God then? Interestingly, this psalm mentions a number of different ways we pray. We confess our sins. We keep silence. Sometimes we groan in pain. We petition God, asking for help and protection. We listen and learn, receiving instruction and guidance. And we rejoice, giving praise and thanks to God. And, of course, there are other methods of praying.

The takeaway from this psalm is that we should be praying daily. No matter what our need or what type of prayer our current situation requires, we should be opening ourselves to God.

One of my recent delights as a parent has been the way Sebastian has embraced prayer. A beautiful moment occurred this week. Michael invited the new Associate Conference Minister, Darrell Goodwin, over for dinner, as Michael and he are already friends from serving on the United Church of Christ Board of Directors together. When we sat down to the table, before we could eat, Sebastian asked me to pray and reached out to Darrell to hold his hand, indicating that we all need to hold hands around the table. And a little child shall lead them.

The psalmist declares that if we do pray to God, then we will perceive our help and protection; we will experience forgiveness; our trust in God will develop; we will learn and gain understanding; we will be surrounded by love; and therefore we will be happy, shouting for joy. Those are all pretty good things. I want those every day—love, joy, understanding, trust, forgiveness, deliverance.

So, the wisdom of the ancient poet aligns with this recent article on the psychological importance of our small daily rituals. Those daily practices, such as prayer, bring order to our chaos, filling our lives with beauty, joy, and wonder.

In the weeks of Lent that remain, be attentive to your daily rituals—the ordinary things that connect you to God.

And make prayer a part of every day. Prayer can be short and simple, it can be silent, with no words, it can even be an gentle thank you. Each day take a moment to open yourself to God.