

Devotions for the Seventh Sunday after Pentecost, July 28-August 1, 2025

Monday of Pentecost 7 – Prayer of the Week

O Lord, let Your merciful ears be attentive to the prayers of Your servants, and by Your Word and Spirit teach us how to pray that our petitions may be pleasing before You; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

One of the things I love about being a pastor is that I get to meet so many interesting people. Herb had been placed in an orphanage when he was a child. His mother could not care for him in the Great Depression. He ran away when he could. What he described in that place can only be called abuse. He joined the military and spent the rest of his career either in uniform or working for a military contractor. I don't think he ever graduated from high school. Herb could pray. He could pray like no one I had ever heard pray. He opened his heart and out of his mouth came words of love, devotion, praise, and supplication which bore eloquent witness to a lot of time spent on his knees in prayer.

I learned most of what I know about praying from Herb and my parents. No one at the seminary ever taught me how to pray. No one even tried. I think that was a failure of my seminary education. I am glad God did not fail to educate me. He gave me Herb. We started a small ministry of prayer in the first parish I served. It was just a group of people, including Herb, who would come together and pray.

I find that many of my parishioners over the years feel they are not good at praying. I still have much to learn. Luther, who prayed for hours every day, once said that he wished he could pray like his dog watched him eat sausage. He yearned for that sort of single-minded attention to God. Even great practitioners of the art of prayer are always growing into it. If you know someone who prays, ask them about that. Ask them why they pray, how they pray, and ask if you can join them in prayer. Let them be your teacher. We pray that God would teach us to pray. He will do that through people who pray. Start that conversation today. Go to the school of prayer. Sit at the feet of someone who is further along in that prayer-life than you. They will teach you something.

Tuesday of Pentecost 7 – Genesis 18:17-33

¹⁷ The LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, ¹⁸ seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? ¹⁹ For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him." ²⁰ Then the LORD said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, ²¹ I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me. And if not, I will know."

²² So the men turned from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD. ²³ Then Abraham drew near and said, “Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? ²⁴ Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you then sweep away the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? ²⁵ Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” ²⁶ And the LORD said, “If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake.”

²⁷ Abraham answered and said, “Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. ²⁸ Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking. Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?” And he said, “I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there.” ²⁹ Again he spoke to him and said, “Suppose forty are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of forty I will not do it.” ³⁰ Then he said, “Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak. Suppose thirty are found there.” He answered, “I will not do it, if I find thirty there.” ³¹ He said, “Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it.” ³² Then he said, “Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once. Suppose ten are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of ten I will not destroy it.” ³³ And the LORD went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham, and Abraham returned to his place.

I did not grow up in a haggling culture, but I have visited them. I find such a culture intriguing and strange at the same time. I once heard of a missionary in India whom the local vendors would no longer serve. He refused to haggle over the price of their wares with them. About the only place we might still dicker about a price is at a car lot. I for one am relieved that there are places to buy a car which no longer do that. I am just not very good at it.

Abraham was clearly good at haggling. He cajoled God all the way down to ten righteous people in Sodom. It is one of the most interesting examples of prayer in the Bible. Of course, in Abraham’s culture this was normal. We confess an omnipotent and omniscient God. He surely knew what Abraham was going to do and just how many righteous people there were in Sodom. I think it was approaching zero if you read a little further in Genesis. Lot and his daughters were hardly paragons of virtue. But God walks with Abraham, listens, and converses with him. I think God likes to hear from us, no matter what we might say.

I once walked back to my office from chapel with a member of our psychology department at Concordia. At the time, I was responsible for the chapel program, and she felt she needed to say something. She felt that the Lenten hymn which we had just sung was too depressing. She felt that worship music should be upbeat and happy. I was surprised and told her so. She of all people, as a psychologist, someone who dealt with the emotional ups and downs of people, should know and rejoice that we could bring the whole breadth of our emotions to God in prayer and song. God loves me and wants to hear from me on my sad days and my joyful days. We can tell God anything about ourselves. He is strong enough to take it. How are you feeling today? Is

it happy, sad, worried, confident, or something else? Speak your heart to God. He listens. He listened to Abraham's prayer.

Wednesday of Pentecost 7 – Psalm 138

- ¹ I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart;
before the gods I sing your praise;
- ² I bow down toward your holy temple
and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness,
for you have exalted above all things
your name and your word.
- ³ On the day I called, you answered me;
my strength of soul you increased.
- ⁴ All the kings of the earth shall give you thanks, O LORD,
for they have heard the words of your mouth,
- ⁵ and they shall sing of the ways of the LORD,
for great is the glory of the LORD.
- ⁶ For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly,
but the haughty he knows from afar.
- ⁷ Though I walk in the midst of trouble,
you preserve my life;
you stretch out your hand against the wrath of my enemies,
and your right hand delivers me.
- ⁸ The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me;
your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever.
Do not forsake the work of your hands.

When I was a professor, one of my favorite events of the year was our awards ceremony. Prior to the big day, we would, as a faculty, take note of the student body from the past year and single out students who had been exemplary in some way. At the event, a faculty member would stand before the assembled parents and students and speak of what we had seen. We would sing their praises.

The psalmist in this psalm is singing the praises of God. I think we have a different definition of that word today. We often think we praise someone when we speak to that person some words of encouragement and praise. But in fact, praise is more accurately spoken to someone other than the person we are talking about. We praised the students when we told their parents and peers what good things they had done, and which we had seen. When we praise God, we are not speaking to Him, but we are speaking about Him and His glorious, gracious deeds to other people. When we tell Him what a great God He is, we are technically adoring Him. That is another good thing to do.

The psalmist points to a time when he walked through days of trouble and God delivered him. He spoke of God's regard for the humble and lowly person, namely the psalmist himself. What has God done for you? Have you told anyone about it? Do not tell some Bible story or someone else's story. Tell your own story. Reflect on your life as the psalmist did. See those moments when God has been there for you. Praise Him to the people in your life.

Thursday of Pentecost 7 – Colossians 2:6-19

⁶ Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. ⁹ For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰ and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. ¹¹ In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³ And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

¹⁶ Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. ¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. ¹⁸ Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, ¹⁹ and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

“I just have to be true to my real self,” she said. We were in my office when I was professor. This student was struggling with many issues, including sexuality. She was identifying herself as a member of the LGBTQ+ population. I am a student of Augustine, a theologian who lived in 4th and 5th centuries AD. Augustine would have been troubled by her statement. He had tried to be true to himself and found only misery and death. He learned, through much suffering, to be true to God and God's gift to himself. As he said in the opening paragraph of his Confessions, “We are restless until we rest in Thee.”

The young person who sat in my office had been taken captive by a particular, contemporary philosophy, namely, that reality is something which we construct. She perceived that she was actually and man and wanted to conform her body to her inner conviction. This philosophy says

that all reality was something we make so she could change her gender despite her biological nature. I am sure there is a great deal of suffering and difficulty behind that desire to change gender and I would never want to minimize that. But I am also sure that the philosophy which tells her that gender is only a construct instead of a thing she was given has also caused her great harm.

Paul warns us against being captured by the philosophy of the day. In his time, the philosophy in question seemed to be a sort of spiritualism which thought that only the non-physical world really mattered. Notice how often Paul speaks of body and physical things in this book and the passage which follows. “The whole fullness of God dwells in him bodily,...” This whole book contends with this idea and asserts that the salvation of the universe happened in a physical action: “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.” Colossians 1:19-20.

Paul’s words also speak to us in this time. We are the creatures of a loving and wise God. Sin has contorted His creation, but in love He has redeemed it, physically. Our bodies and our world are now things for which Jesus has died, rendering them of inestimable value. God loves this young person who sat in my office and who admitted to me her great struggle. I believe God was contending with this miserable worldly philosophy that day. I pray he used my words to help her.

Friday of Pentecost 7 – Luke 11:1-13

¹ Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” ² And he said to them, “When you pray, say:

“Father, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.

³ Give us each day our daily bread,

⁴ and forgive us our sins,

for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.
And lead us not into temptation.”

⁵ And he said to them, “Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves, ⁶ for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; ⁷ and he will answer from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything’? ⁸ I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs. ⁹ And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. ¹¹ What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; ¹² or if he asks for an egg, will give him a

scorpion? ¹³ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

We found out later, after he ran off, that Brad was in fact not a good person, not a good person at all. He had been abusing and dealing in drugs. This explained much of his erratic behavior and the frequent absences from the responsibilities which God had given him. Yet he loved his little girls. How does one explain such contradictions? I suppose the evolutionary biologist would speak of how we instinctually are better able to survive as a species because those who cared for their children passed along their genes. I rather prefer to think that God has written on our hearts a natural law in which parents, even profoundly broken and sinful human beings, care for their children.

Jesus notices this fact of fathers who still manage to care for their children. He uses it to tell us something more about God. For the same God who wrote that truth on our hearts lives it out in his dealings with us. Jesus tells us that even wicked people like us will give something good to our children. God, who is goodness personified, will give the Holy Spirit to us, the greatest good of all.

In this passage, Jesus is encouraging us to pray. His most potent encouragement is that God really wants to help you. Jesus notes that wicked judges and wicked people will still often hear a request and respond appropriately. How much more so our God, who made us, loves us, and given us life itself. Why not talk to Him today. Ask Him to help you. He wants to help.