

Pastor Roy's sermon from March 9, 2014 (1st Sunday of Lent)

Children's sermon: When do you like to be loud? When do you like to be quiet? Sometimes we pray out loud. Sometimes we pray quietly. Songs are prayers. When we sing our last song and play instruments, we are praying loudly. But now that Ash Wednesday has passed, we are in Lent, and in Lent we pray quietly. So we will not be playing instruments, but you can still come up and walk down the aisle singing and praying. When do we get the instruments back out? Easter.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are different strains of wisdom in the Old Testament. When you read the Psalms, some seem to assume that good things come to good people, and bad things happen to bad people. Then in other Psalms, the people cry out for help because of injustice and trouble. Then there are Psalms which express gladness for God's redemption from the pit of death, from the darkest trouble. The first chapters of Genesis are no different.

Genesis 1 describes a world created well by a good, orderly, Holy God. The faithful in Israel often lived among people who believed the earth was ruled by greedy and lustful gods. Not so with Israel. Their version of the creation story is of a good God who creates a good creation well. Genesis 2 and 3, from which we heard a few verses today, is a very different account of creation. The language and plot of this narrative reminds me of Native American stories of coyotes and bears which talk and explain why things are the way they are .

God shapes the first man from the soil and breathes life into him. God is baffled along with the man Adam because he isn't satisfied with any of the other animals until God makes him sleep, takes out a rib and fashions it into one like him, the first woman, Eve. They become friends and partners in caring for the garden in which God has placed them.

They are given ground rules for living in the garden but they decide that it would be ok if they go their own way and trust in their hunches rather than in the wisdom of God. Of course, when they are asked about it later, they avoid personal responsibility ultimately blame God the creator. It's your fault we're in this mess.

Isn't that the way it goes? All is well, all is good in the world. . .until it is not. Then we struggle to figure out what's wrong and how to make it right again. Here we learn to pray. Here we learn that it is beyond us. We cannot make it work out the way we want it to. We begin to let go of the reins and trust. We don't want to trust, but we have no choice since we have run out of options.

Paul sees this at work in the goodness and justice of Christ. This is the Gospel. Trust in mercy which leads us to life for all.

Prayer is learning to trust. Adam and Eve turn away and run. When they realize their mistake, they deny it at first, then have no choice but to turn and receive mercy from God who is only trying to walk with them in the garden in the cool of the evening. They do learn to trust, to listen, to offer themselves back to God, but only after God shows mercy upon mercy.

For Paul the best example of trusting prayer is Jesus' life, death, and resurrection in mercy.

Jesus, who refuses to place his final trust in survival—bread.

Jesus, who refuses to place his hope in spectacular displays of religious manipulation.

Jesus, who refuses to trust in the abuse of political power to make things happen.

Jesus learned by prayer to trust, to wait, to hope, to lead, to return, to rest in the peace of the One who

holds it all together.

Jesus prays. His was a disciplined, listening prayer.

We are often tempted to pray when we're desperate, when we find the time, when we're particularly inspired. This prayer is the icing on the cake of our lives. Makes everything nice, just right. Prayer when we are in jam. Smooths over the rough edges, seeks mercy for our guilt and comforts our fear without addressing the root causes—because the center of this prayer is me. . .and you.

But that kind of prayer is a gimmick. A mind game, a false comfort, a grasping after straws.

Jesus' prayer is centered in God. This kind of prayer is not the icing but the cake itself—actually, it is not cake at all, but fully balanced meal with exercise and mental challenges too.

Prayer holds together and is the foundation for everything that we do. It is the invitation for every action. It is hope and peace. We don't pray that things will work out. Prayer allows us to see how things are already working out and how we can join in the work of the Spirit. Prayer allows us to live into our faith. Prayer is living our faith—in trust and hope. Not with certainty, but with a holy uncertainty that waits for the final word and confesses our own weakness and overwhelming need for help.

Thanks be to God for the honest season of Lent. May we continue to learn to pray. Amen.