

Daily Morning Messages
St Paul United Church of Christ
5312 Old Blue Rock Road, Cincinnati, Ohio 45247
Allen M Fluent, Pastor
For the Week of October 25-31, 2021

Dear Friends,

In the spring of 2020, when we found that in-person worship was going to be restricted for some time and many people would be confined to their homes, I realized that I needed a way to maintain spiritual contact with our members. That's when I began providing a five day a week message, Monday through Friday, that was emailed to all our members and placed on the church's Facebook page. This week concludes my ministry as the transitional pastor at St Paul Church, and I thought it would be a fitting conclusion to my time with you to provide one final week of daily morning messages. Instead of the lectionary readings, I've chosen the 119th Psalm for our readings this week. It is the longest Psalm in the Bible. It has 176 verses that, in the Hebrew original, are divided into 22 stanzas, forming an acrostic based on the 22 characters of the Hebrew alphabet.

The Psalm is a beautiful work written by an author who had suffered many misfortunes but was able to celebrate the blessings of living by the teachings of God. I commend it to you in its entirety for your devotional reading this week. I think you will find its language rich in images of the good and purposeful life. The following daily messages are my thoughts on some of the verses that have meaning for me and that I would like to share with you.

Blessings in your journey of faith, as you continue to practice daily devotional reading of the Scriptures.

Allen M Fluent, Pastor for the Transition

Monday, October 25

*Happy are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord.
Happy are those who keep God's decrees, who seek God with their whole
heart., who also do no wrong, but walk in God's ways. (Psalm 119:1-3)*

It is deeply tragic that the Law of God is seen by so many Christians as a basis for judgment and punishment, when that is clearly not the intention of the Biblical writers. It seems noteworthy that this longest psalm, celebrating the Law of God,

begins with the word “happy.” Throughout the Scriptures, the laws, decrees and testimonies by which God gives guidance to the people are seen as blessings. Living by them is considered to be a way of living that produces joy. When the Christian New Testament speaks negatively about the law, it is not because the Law of God does not provide the opportunity for a blessed way of life, but because human beings are often guilty of neglecting what Jesus called the “weightier matters of the law,” meaning love of God and neighbor, and instead choose to use legalistic assertions to bring judgments against others.

Tuesday, October 26

*Deal bountifully with your servant, so that I may live and observe your word.
Open my eyes, so that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.
(Psalm 119:18-19)*

“Open My Eyes that I may See,” a popular 19th Century hymn written by Clara H Scott, is based on this text from Psalm 119. Its lyrics convey the idea the Word of God gives us just a glimpse of the truth of God’s eternal love:

*Open my eyes that I may see glimpses of truth thou hast for me.
Place in my hands the wonderful key that shall unclasp and set me free.*

The Psalm is a testimony to the assurance of an eternal benevolence that is at the heart of the ways of God. At times, our eyes are blinded by the chaos of our human world in conflict. Our eyes need to be opened to wondrous things again. This is the gift of faith.

Wednesday, October 27

*Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes, and I will observe it with my whole heart. Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it.
Turn my heart to your decrees, and not to selfish gain.
Turn my eyes from looking at vanities; give me life in your ways.
(Psalm 119:33-37)*

A world that has become too individualistic sees freedom as a way to escape responsibility for one another, but such freedom is a selfish thing that does not bring happiness. True delight is experienced in a life that is shared in community with others. That is the sacred meaning of living by the ways of God and the sacred purpose of God’s Law.

Thursday, October 28

*This is my comfort in my distress, that your promise gives me life.
The arrogant utterly deride me, but I do not turn away from your law.
When I think of your ordinances from of old, I take comfort, O Lord.
(Psalm 119:50-52)*

We don't often think of the law of God bringing comfort, but the law includes the promise. God's grace is not something separate from the law; it is its complement. Some of the most beautiful words of the Heidelberg Catechism, the faith statement of the German Reformed tradition are contained in the first question and answer:

What is your only comfort in life and in death? That I belong, in life and in death, not to myself, but to my faithful savior, Jesus Christ, who, at the cost of his own blood, has fully paid for all my sins....

According to the traditions of our faith, in Christ there is judgment, but there is no condemnation. The recognition of wrongdoing is an essential component of justice, and making things right with those who are harmed is a preliminary condition for forgiveness; but the focus of our life together is reconciliation and peace with God.

Friday, October 29

*Let my cry come before you, O Lord; give me understanding according to your promise.
My lips will pour forth praise, because you teach me your statutes.
My tongue will sing of your promise, for all your commandments are right.
Let your hand be ready to help me, for I have chosen your precepts.
I long for your salvation, O Lord, and your law is my delight.
Let me live that I may praise you, and let your ordinances help me.
I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek out your servant, for I do not forget your commandments. (Psalm 119:169-176)*

There may be no more powerful image of God's love than the parable of the lost sheep that Jesus told. The shepherd in the story goes to look for the lost one, even at great peril to himself and possibly to the flock. It is crazy behavior. It reminds us of the love we know in Jesus, who has shown God's crazy love for us. The last line of the psalm includes a confession. This is not the work of someone who has been perfect in his life. He asks to be sought out by God, because he still remembers the joy there is in doing right.

Today, I close with the final prayer of the Evangelical Catechism, the traditional statement of faith of the German Evangelical Church in America:

Lord Jesus Christ, for you I live, for you I suffer, for you I die.

Yours I will be in life and in death. Grant me, O Lord, eternal salvation. Amen.