

Praying with Isaiah 43:1-5

Isaiah 43:1-5

January 13, 2013

I: Introduction

Instead of a sermon, we want to introduce you today to one way of praying with the Bible. Most churches, whether Mennonite, Baptist, Lutheran, or something else, assume two things about good church-going Christians. First, they assume good church-going Christians already know how to pray. And second, good church-going Christians pray frequently throughout the week.

We're not sure how well either of these assumptions matches reality. In this congregation we do teach young people in the baptism exploration class a few ways to pray. But once people are baptized, we provide no regular training in prayer beyond what we model in worship services, which is largely restricted to prayers of intercession and thanksgiving.

This morning we'll pray together for 15 minutes. That might seem like a long time to pray, but it's not. Older Mennonites tell stories that longer ago in some churches, the main prayer in worship could last 30 minutes. In any case, if you were in love with someone, wouldn't you jump at the chance to spend 20 minutes with him or her?

II: Getting Ready

What we'll do together is called guided prayer or guided meditation. We will take turns guiding the steps of this prayer, but these are suggestions. You can let the Holy Spirit and your imagination take you where you need to go.

So find a comfortable position in your chair that you can maintain for 15 minutes, then close your eyes to lessen distractions.

Relax and breathe deeply in the presence of God here in this room.

III: Naming Fear and Hearing God's Voice

Allow your mind to focus on a time when you were afraid. This could be situation in the past, a situation in the future you're afraid of, or a situation you're in the middle of right now. The fear could be small or large.

Imagine yourself in a setting where you can feel the fear. Using your senses, look around. What do you see? If other people are in this place, you can look at their faces. What do you smell or taste? What do you touch?

Notice your feelings. As if you are observing yourself, what does the fear do to you? How do you feel?

Become aware of God's presence in this setting. God is with you in the middle of your fear. Relax into this awareness of God.

Now God speaks to you, and you listen.

"Thus says the Lord: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name. You are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. When you walk through fire, you shall not be burned. The flame will not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior."

Consider God's words. God has redeemed you, called you, saved you. Respond to God with whatever words come to you. Be honest as you talk to God in your mind.

What are you afraid of? Name the fear to God. Tell God what power this fear has in your life. Ask God for the help you need. How does God respond to you?

What do you need from God to protect yourself from being consumed by fear? What do you want from God?

Hear God say these words directly to you:

"You are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you."

What do you say in response?

IV: Releasing Fear to God

As you think about your fear, you can clench your fists as a symbol of how this fear grips you. If you want, you can keep your fists clenched over the next few minutes.

Once again, name your fear to God. Tell God how the fear is on your mind and heart. Explain how it gets in the way of the person you want to be and God wants you to be.

Acknowledge that to release this fear, you want to trust God. Realize you can't do this on your own.

Again God speaks to you, and you listen.

“Thus says the Lord: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name. You are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. When you walk through fire, you shall not be burned. The flame will not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.”

Consider what it might be like to let go of the fear. How might you be different?

When and if you're ready to release your fear to God, unclench your fists. Open them. Perhaps you want to open your palms upward as a sign of release.

This might take a while. You don't need to rush. Maybe you can't release it right now. But you can pray for strength to let go. In your own time, you can allow this to happen.

V: Concluding

As we come to the end of this prayer, know you can come back to this releasing prayer whenever you like, as long as you like.

Offer God your own words of gratitude or praise. Close the prayer in a way that's right for you.

Amen.