

Zion Lutheran Church, Harrisburg, PA /September 27, 2023
WOW (Worship On Wednesday) – FALL SERIES - 12:10pm Service of the Word
“KNEELING WITH GIANTS – Learning to Pray with History’s Best Teachers”
Based on the book of the same name by Gary Neal Hansen
Praying with The Pilgrim: The Jesus Prayer

Welcome & Announcements

Opening Versicles

L O Lord, open my lips.

C **and my mouth shall declare Your praise.**

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.

Confession and Forgiveness

L Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another.

Silence for self-examination

C **I confess to God Almighty, before the whole company of heaven and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have sinned in thought, word, and deed; wherefore I pray to God Almighty to have mercy on me, forgive me all my sins, and bring me to everlasting life. Amen.**

L The almighty and merciful Lord grant you pardon, forgiveness, and remission of all your sins. Amen.

Prayer

L The Lord be with you,

C **And also with you.**

L Let us pray: Heavenly Father, in whom we live and move and have our being: We humbly pray you so to guide and govern us by your Holy Spirit, that in all the cares and occupations of our life we may never forget you, but remember that we are ever walking in your sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

C **Amen.**

Scripture Readings:

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. ¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰ Do not despise prophecies, ²¹ but test everything; hold fast what is good. ²² Abstain from every form of

evil. ²³ Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

Luke 18:9-14

⁹ He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: ¹⁰ “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ ¹³ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

L The Word of the Lord.

C **Thanks be to God.**

Readings from The Pilgrim's Tale

The Gospel and the Jesus Prayer are one and the same thing... For the divine name of Jesus Christ contains in itself all the Gospel truths. The holy fathers say the Jesus Prayer is an abridgment of the entire Gospel...

Sit in silence and alone. Bend your head. Close your eyes. Breathe ever more quietly. With the imagination look inside your heart. Carry your intellect, that is your thought, out of your head and into your heart. As you breathe say quietly with your lips or in your intellect alone: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.” ... Try to drive away your thoughts. Keep restful patience and repeat this process very frequently...

In no great length of time I felt that the prayer somehow was beginning to move into my heart by itself. That is it seemed that as it beat normally my heart began to form the words of the prayer inside itself with every heartbeat, for example, the first beat, Lord, at the second, Jesus, at the third, Christ, and so on. I stopped saying the prayer vocally and began to listen carefully to my heart speaking...

In the end I felt that the prayer arose and was uttered in my mind and heart by itself, without any effort on my part. Not only in a watchful state but also in my sleep the prayer carried on in precisely the same way. Nothing interrupted it or stopped it for the briefest moment, no matter what I was doing. My soul thanked the Lord and my heart melted away in unceasing gladness...

Homily

The Prayers

L Show us your mercy, O Lord,

C and grant us your salvation.

L Clothe your ministers with righteousness.

C Let your people sing with joy.

L Give peace, O Lord, in all the world,

C for only in you can we live in safety.

L Lord, keep this nation under your care.

C and guide us in the way of justice and truth.

L Let your way be known upon the earth;

C your saving health among all nations.

L Let not the needy, O Lord, be forgotten,

C nor the hope of the poor be taken away.

L Create in us clean hearts, O God,

C and sustain us with your Holy Spirit.

L *Additional petitions offered...*

Into your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. **C Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

L Lord, remember us in your kingdom and reach us to pray:

C Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Benediction

L Let us bless the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

L The Lord almighty bless us and direct our days and our deeds in his peace.

C Amen.

Additional Teaching on Praying the Jesus Prayer

From Kneeling with Giants by Gary Neal Hansen

Jesus is, after all, the “name that is above every name” to whom all creation will one day bow (Philippians 2:9-11). He holds all creation together (Colossians 1:15-17). He is truth itself (John 14:6). His name is a word that puts us in touch with *the Word*, the One who was before creation with God and indeed who is God (John 1:1-3). Jesus’ birth made this God known in time and space (John 1:14).

Pick a number of times to say it each day, and once that becomes easy, increase the number. The elder gave the pilgrim prayer beads to keep count, but the traditional Orthodox prayer tool is a rope, or *chokti*, a ring of cord with thirty-three or more knots that can be held or worn around the wrist. Each time you say the Jesus Prayer, you move to the next knot. Eventually, it becomes a physical and mental habit.

A second method many find easier is to pray the Jesus Prayer for a fixed amount of time, say five minutes per day. That can be worked into anyone’s life: at daybreak or in bed before sleep, before getting out of the car after a commute or on a coffee break. Then, at a pace that feels comfortable, say the Jesus Prayer over and over. Some set a timer so they can focus without glancing at the clock, though it can be a bit jarring to be drawn from prayer with an alarm bell. When it is comfortable, expand the time. Eventually the prayer will find its way into other parts of the day.

I find that the Jesus Prayer is also a real aid to intercession, just as the monk taught the pilgrim in the last conversations of the book. Rather than praying “have mercy on me” the monk says, “When we are remembering our neighbor we ought to pray in this manner: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on your servant X. ...* You can offer a prayer like this for your neighbors several times when you happen to remember them.”

Some learn to pray the Jesus Prayer when they are angry or anxious out of a related desire to be centered. I suspect that this is a spiritually more helpful kind of centeredness than just stopping to take a few deep breaths. Rather than centering us in ourselves, it puts Christ back in the center, and us back in orbit around him. Though feelings are not the goal, researchers have used biofeedback techniques to show that praying the Jesus Prayer causes a particularly profound state of relaxation. The mind can remain peaceful and attentive long after praying the Jesus Prayer.