

Poetry; I was introduced to poetry in grade 9 by Miss Dixon. No matter what Miss Dixon tried, I had difficulty understanding poetry – it was the subtle interpretations that caused my difficulty. The Psalms in our holy scriptures are poetry. On Tuesday, during ‘Coffee and Bible with the pastor’, I shared how we would read and discuss the scriptures in this order: Mark, 1 Corinthians, Deuteronomy, and IF there was time Psalm 111 – and that was a big IF. Since my faith is based upon Jesus; I had assumed that I would be using Mark’s gospel, as I had done in the past.

It was later on Wednesday; after making three visits, that I began to spend more time with the scriptures. It was during this thoughtful prayerful time that I felt the Holy Spirit’s presence – the Psalm was to be my beginning point for today’s sermon. Today I’m basing the sermon on poetry – and with the Holy Spirit’s guidance, I hope we all have a better understanding.

I was taught as a child, to say my prayers when I went to bed – ‘Now, I lay me down to sleep...’. I was taught a grace to say before a meal – ‘Lord, for the food that we are about to receive...’ Some would say that these prayers are poems but to us they are prayers – this is how I talk to God – this is me having a conversation with God.

Prayer is meant to be a conversation between us and God. Now the usual time that most people pray, is exactly like when I was taught to pray. Just before I go to bed and just before I eat. But if I think about it, I sleep and eat pretty well on my own. It’s during the rest of my day that I need to be in conversation with God.

Psalm 111 is a psalm of praise, a song of adoration and thanksgiving to God who is worthy of our prayers and praise. “Praise the Lord! I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart, in the company of the upright, in the congregation” (Ps 111:1 NRSV). Not only does the writer of the psalm call us to praise the Lord with our “whole heart,” he tells us what it is about the Lord that makes God worthy of such praise. “Great are the works of the Lord” (v. 2). “The works of his hands are faithful and just” (v. 7). “He sent redemption to his people” (v. 9). The psalmist poetically reminds the reader that God is worthy of our prayers and praise, not just

when we eat and when we sleep, but in all time and in all places. Yet so often we forget to come before God unless something is wrong.

When my kids were younger, I suffered from asthma. Ventolin and beclovent were the prescribed medications that I used to relieve the symptoms. My pattern was as follows: I took the medication as directed. My breathing improved and I thought I had outgrown the asthma. My lungs had been cured. When the prescribed medication ran out I felt I did not have to purchase any more. I really thought that I did not need any help. Within a few days I began having difficulty breathing and it was off to the doctor's to get another prescription for ventolin and beclovent. After picking up the puffers at the pharmacy, taking two puffs with each, the lungs began to fill and expand again.

The reality is that this pattern is not reserved for asthma alone. Our pattern is as follows: we attend worship, we say our prayers and sing praises to God, we live in community with Christ and one another, and we feel a peace and joy that is hard to describe, even in the midst of difficulty or trouble. So because we've been at peace for a while, we convince ourselves that we don't need to pray or worship or spend time in community anymore. We're quite sure we've managed to deal with our problems and concerns on our own, and therefore we are no longer in need of any help. Within days of avoiding conversation with God or isolating ourselves from our faith communities, we feel dry and restless and out of sync. Just as my difficulty breathing was a direct result of my lack of medicine, my restlessness is a direct result of my lack of time in relationship with God. And just like returning to my medicine allows me to breathe easily, so giving thanks and praise to God with my 'whole heart' brings me an instant sense of gratitude and peace. If only we could ever believe in the mighty power of our mighty God! If only we didn't wait until the symptoms exist to seek the cure!

The psalmist concludes Psalm 111 by saying that "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (v. 10). So often we incorrectly associated *fear* with words like *anxiety*, *terror* or *panic*. Yet the Hebrew language, like many other languages, is rich in depth of meaning. The word *fear* can also mean to be in awe of something, to be in complete and utter reverence before something. To 'fear' the Lord is not to panic in God's presence or to be afraid of God, but rather to bow down in adoration and thanksgiving, in awe and reverence for the amazing deeds God had done in our lives.

As the psalmist finishes this poem of praise, we are told that to be in awe and reverence before our Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Wisdom, our knowledge and understanding, comes from our ability to bow down before our awesome and powerful God, not just when we think we need to. The more we *fear* the Lord, the wiser we become. The more we understand our need for prayer and community, the more we find peace and joy.

If you have had a dog or any kind of fish, you know that when you feed them, they gobble up their food as if it's the last meal they will ever receive. If you feed hummingbirds, you will know that hummingbirds are said to visit their source of food hundreds of times a day. Praying at mealtime and before bed is like eating the meal of a dog or fish. We scarf it down quickly and get through it without much thought. As the psalm reminds us, God is worthy of our "whole heart" as we stand in awe of the grace and love God pours out on us. Therefore, our model for prayer should be that of the hummingbird, as we visit the source of our salvation hundreds of times throughout the day.

We praise God for all we've received, and we stand in awe of God for loving us, protecting us, and providing for us. Medicine makes us well, God makes us whole, and visiting the source of our salvation throughout the day provides us with a relationship in which we stand in awe of God who deserves nothing less than our "whole heart".