

“Blessed be God, because He has not rejected my prayer or removed His steadfast love from me!” Psalm 66:20



Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELK)

**St. Trinity Congregation at St. Lukas, Leipzig**

Third Sunday after Trinity Sunday, June 28, 2020

Mission Service followed by congregational gathering

Sermon by Pastor Markus Fischer

Before we think, advise, and make decisions in the congregational meeting, some concerns are stirred in us. How can we cope with the major tasks we are faced with? How do we reach church members who no longer come? How can we share the Gospel with people in our community?

To start, the Psalm verse leads us to an amazing praise of God.

We have countless reasons to praise God: our praise goes to the Creator, who intended that we should exist. Our praise goes to the Redeemer, who became human for us, died and rose again for us. Our praise goes to the Holy Spirit, who gave us new birth in Holy Baptism and made us children of God.

We also praise and thank God for every new day of life He gives us. We praise Him and give thanks that He gives us so many good experiences in our lives. He has helped us through many illnesses, hardships, and dangers. Where we wanted to give up, He gave us new courage and strength. We have all, each in our own way, experienced God's gracious guidance and ruling, as it says in the hymn: "What need or grief Ever has failed of relief? Wings of His mercy did shade you." ("Praise to the Lord, the Almighty," Lutheran Service Book 790, verse 3)

We praise God that we know Jesus Christ and the Gospel. We thank God that through His Spirit, He has enlightened our hearts to believe. There have been significant problems in our congregational history. The move to St. Lukas seemed too difficult to some. But God sent us many helpers and donations. What seemed impossible to us before is now a great gift. And we could go on for a long time and list God's gifts for which we owe Him praise and thanks.

But the Psalm verse draws our attention to something special and that should also produce praise for God in our hearts and on our lips:

“Blessed be God, because He has not rejected my prayer or removed His steadfast love from me.”

We can pray. We can seek God’s heart and help with our weak thoughts and poor words. We can call God our Father, we can put everything in God’s strong arms that burdens and scares us.

This does not go without saying. That’s why there is such amazement in the words of the Psalmist: “Blessed be God, because He has not rejected my prayer!”

The high holy God might well think: oh, what is he doing, what does it matter to me about her little trifles? I am the Lord of the world and not the servant of a few small, miserable, guilty people. I don’t want to know about these mosquitos, these mayflies don’t interest me.

But that’s not how God thinks, feels, and talks. “Blessed be God, because He has not rejected my prayer!” God’s thoughts encompass the whole world and at the same time, there is space for each of us in His heart. God doesn’t turn away from you and me, He turns to us.

How do we know this? We know and believe it in the new covenant of grace because God’s eternal Son became man and in Jesus Christ, God always makes the effort for the many and for the individual at the same time. “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.” That same Jesus is the image of God’s care for the people but also the image of a shepherd, who runs after one lost sheep and doesn’t give up until He finds it and can carry it on His shoulders back to the herd.

Jesus Christ suffered on the cross for the sins of the whole world. But there on the cross, He also had the time and heart for the one crucified with Him on His right. Jesus doesn’t reject the man’s request, and this man was a terrorist, a murderer. “Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom. And Jesus said to him, ‘Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.’”

When we pray, we call on God in the name of Jesus. Then we can be quite certain: with our small needs, we insignificant and weak people, whose names are not known to the general public – we are known by God! We are not too small for the great Lord of the world and what we put before Him is not too dingy or unimportant. He is waiting for our childish requests and supplications and wants to answer our prayers as a father. This applies to us individual Christians as well as for our community and church: weak in influence, small in number, despised by many.

After every prayer, spoken in the name of Jesus, we can say: “Blessed be God, because He has not rejected my prayer!”

“Or removed His steadfast love from me!” as the verse concludes.

After all, when we pray, it's not just our wishes and ideas. Yes, God hears and answers us. We believe that. But how He will answer is a mystery.

The great Paul fervently pleaded with God three times that God would take from him a severe suffering that kept him weak and unfit for service; and got the decision: Let My grace be sufficient for you.

Some burdens God does not remove from our shoulders. Some wounds remain open and some scars won't disappear until we die. And none of us is spared from bitter death.

But we, as people of prayer, can always know under every burden, with every grief and pain: God doesn't take His goodness from us. His heart reflects His kindness to us. His gracious countenance shines upon us.

How do we know this? Again, in view of Jesus Christ. Where we must go underneath and through, He has already gone underneath and through. Our Lord and Savior has gone through the deepest depths and emerged as Victor and Lord.

That's how we know and believe: we are never lost, never alone. This applies to us as individual Christians as well as for our community and church. God does not take His goodness from us – in the name of Jesus, Amen.