

01-28-2024 Worship Service

Morning Prayer –

Loving God, we thank you this morning for the sunshine! We thank you for the moisture that the earth has received and we pray that it can soak down in and nourish the earth deeply. We thank you, God, for the gift of music. Thank you for each student who is here, singing and sharing their gift with us as we worship. We thank you for Mr. Unruh and Ms. Brubaker – for all the teachers and staff in our schools that walk alongside the students, giving them the tools they need for life in this world. We pray for your continued blessing on them as they learn and grow and hone the gifts you've given each one.

We pray not only for the students that are here this morning, but for all the students and families in our communities. We know that there are some who struggle mightily to get from one day to the next and make ends meet. May your love and provision reach the need and may people be open to receiving opportunities to help one another.

O God, we pray for families and people around the world who don't have the resources they need to live full lives with the basic human necessities. We pray for those who've had to flee their homes out of fear for their lives. We know, God, that borders between peoples were not necessarily part of your original creation, but that many were created when groups of peoples were hungry for power over others. Grant compassion and care for those who find themselves without a country, without a home, without security or safety. Bless those who are working in various parts of the world to lend help.

We pray for leaders – of towns and counties, of cities and states, of nations and armies. Gracious God, the world seems topsy-turvy and like the writer of our psalm this morning, it's important for us to remember that our trust is in you and that you are Yahweh God, almighty, all-compassionate Creator of all that is. Your love never ends – and it has humanity's best interests at heart! Be also with leaders in The Church – congregational and denominational. Guide your people with your Holy Spirit as we strive to be faithful together.

We offer our prayers, God, for Meribeth, Cindy, Russ and Bart as they and others grieve Rannie's loss and celebrate his life. Be with them as they adjust to his physical absence. We pray for others who are mourning someone they love and we ask for your spirit of presence and comfort.

Be with us as we continue now in this service of worship. Guide us with your Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name. Amem.

Message -- Trusting in God's Love – Psalm 63

Pastor Lois Harder

Let me begin with a little word of explanation. I love choirs. I love singing in them and I love listening to them. I appreciate the way choral music moves my soul. I'm not sure if I can articulate it exactly, but I think it has to do with the collaborative nature of singing with other people. Breathing together, resting together, following the guidance of a good conductor

together to create different dynamics, singing the texts in ways that make them poignant and meaningful. For me, (and I'm sure for many of you) choral music – which includes singing in a worship service, as part of a congregation – has been a significant part of my spirituality. I often sense the movement of the Holy Spirit when I sing with others and it brings me great joy!

So, as I contemplated the Elbiata Singers being here this morning and a biblical text to accompany your music, what came to mind was to incorporate a psalm of praise. I chose Psalm 63 because I thought it was a familiar psalm that would offer some spoken words of praise along with the music. And then as I unpacked it a little more, it seemed like there are some words of challenge here, as well as praise. So I invite you to take the challenge with me!

The writer of this psalm is challenging us readers to use our senses to help us think about our faith. So... try this...

Try to remember the last time you were really thirsty. Maybe it was after a good, hard workout. Or maybe it was the last time you were sick – you know, that feeling of cotton-mouth when you have a fever or a bad cold. Or maybe it was when you woke up in the morning and the air in your house was that winter- dry and you were thirsty. Remember what it feels like to be really thirsty – and then to have that thirst quenched with a long, satisfying drink of water.

Now imagine being really hungry. Maybe you skipped breakfast because you woke up late, you worked on a project right through your lunch break and now it's 4:00 in the afternoon and you're feeling a little light-headed and woozy. Your stomach is growling and you're hangry. You make it home or to the break room or wherever your favorite protein snacks are stashed and sink your teeth into that cheese stick or that peanut butter sandwich, or you take a bit of that apple or that big monster cookie and you feel the energy returning as your blood gets that sugar and protein kick. Ahhh... it's such a relief to taste that sustenance.

The psalmist gives one more image. Think about a time when you were scared. Maybe it was a health scare – for yourself or someone you love. Maybe it was a near miss when you were driving and one more second could have been a very serious accident. Maybe it was a big storm or a bad dream in the middle of the night. And then, the morning comes and you realize it was a dream, the storm has done some damage but nothing that can't be repaired, you're filled with gratitude and perspective on what's important as you reflect on that close call in your car. Your physician calls and says, "These weren't the test results we were hoping for, but we have options and we'll tackle it together."

Psalm 63 is more than simply unfettered words of praise. It was written by someone who understood that life is more complicated than that. One commentator described it as a lament dominated by trust. I really like that – it's so brutally honest, isn't it? "Psalm 63 is a lament dominated by trust, and so it becomes also a psalm of confidence and thanksgiving." The psalmist was trying to describe how it feels to declare one's faith in God while also experiencing the very real difficulties of life.

This psalmist was doing the hard work of describing what it's like to trust God with tenacity. It's a description of seeking out God's care when you're fainting with thirst, woozy with hunger, shaken to the core with fear and knowing that God is the resource that you need.

All the while the psalmist is praising God, humbly acknowledging that God will quench this thirst and satisfy this hunger and calm the fear. There's the reminder in verse 3 that God's steadfast love – that Hebrew word, *Hesed*, is better than life itself – in fact, life isn't possible without God's *Hesed* holding us up, pulling us through, giving us strength, meeting our needs.

So, sing songs of praise! And sing songs of lament! Sing songs of fear and darkness, of doubt and sadness. Sing songs of peace and light and hope. Sing songs of life. And all the while, remember that God's steadfast love, will meet you together with whatever you're facing. Thanks be to God!

Prayer of Dedication –

Our confession of faith has just been sung, O God! Receive our gifts – of money, of music, of time and talent, of faith and doubt, of our efforts to follow you faithfully in our lives. Amen.