

**Let Us Pray**  
Rev. Nicole Farley  
First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha  
February 22, 2012

**Psalm 51:1-17**

- <sup>1</sup> Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your steadfast love;  
according to your abundant mercy  
blot out my transgressions.
- <sup>2</sup> Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
and cleanse me from my sin.
- <sup>3</sup> For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is ever before me.
- <sup>4</sup> Against you, you alone, have I sinned,  
and done what is evil in your sight,  
so that you are justified in your sentence  
and blameless when you pass judgment.
- <sup>5</sup> Indeed, I was born guilty,  
a sinner when my mother conceived me.
- <sup>6</sup> You desire truth in the inward being;  
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.
- <sup>7</sup> Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;  
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
- <sup>8</sup> Let me hear joy and gladness;  
let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.
- <sup>9</sup> Hide your face from my sins,  
and blot out all my iniquities.
- <sup>10</sup> Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and put a new and right spirit within me.
- <sup>11</sup> Do not cast me away from your presence,  
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
- <sup>12</sup> Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
and sustain in me a willing spirit.
- <sup>13</sup> Then I will teach transgressors your ways,  
and sinners will return to you.
- <sup>14</sup> Deliver me from bloodshed, O God,  
O God of my salvation,  
and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.
- <sup>15</sup> O Lord, open my lips,  
and my mouth will declare your praise.
- <sup>16</sup> For you have no delight in sacrifice;  
if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.
- <sup>17</sup> The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

**Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21**

<sup>1</sup>“Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

<sup>2</sup>“So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. <sup>3</sup>But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup>so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

<sup>5</sup>“And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. <sup>6</sup>But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

<sup>16</sup>“And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. <sup>17</sup>But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, <sup>18</sup>so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

<sup>19</sup>“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; <sup>20</sup>but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup>For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Today is a day when people think about the things they can give up for the next forty days. In the Catholic parish where I grew up, the reason for fasting was never clearly explained, or if it was I did not pick up on it. So I went through my childhood and my early adulthood thinking Lent was all about giving up things I liked. If Jesus was going to sacrifice his life for me, the least I could do was skip chocolate. How guilty and horrible I felt when I succumbed to an M&M!

While the notion of showing gratitude for Jesus’ sacrifice for us is not a bad place to start, I believe a better reason to give things up for Lent is to become closer to God. As Presbyterians, we don’t subscribe to the idea of a required Lenten fast. But, if you choose to do so, think about giving up those things that separate you from God and God’s creation. The reading in Matthew encourages us to give up worrying what other people think. If our minds are preoccupied by wondering if we are being noticed or watched or judged, how focused can we be on God in that moment? If giving up time with the television causes you to pray or read your Bible instead, by all means, give it up. If giving up junk food causes you to become more attuned with the good creation God has made in you, by all means, give it up. If giving up Facebook causes you to go out and serve the least and the last, by all means, give it up.

The psalmist says, “The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” God is not asking that we go through a spiritual boot camp or a painful, heartbreaking experience. God desires that we rely on God - we were created to be in relationship with God and to seek comfort and strength and wisdom in God. Yet, our purely human characteristic is a stubborn self-reliance and a foolish self-deception that we can do it all by ourselves. God desires that we break that spirit of selfishness and come back to God. God hopes that we might desire a new and

right spirit and a clean heart. God desires that we give up those things that separate us from God and God's creation so that we might get closer to God.

We mark, literally and figuratively, the beginning of Lent with a reminder of our mortality. We do this not to be morbid but to cause us to reflect on the meaning of our earthly lives, to cause us to think like the earliest followers would have before they heard Jesus' message. Through the readings in Lent, we begin to learn afresh of God's great mercy and love and of the sacrifices Jesus made for you and for me. We reflect as we relearn; we fall in love with Jesus and are wrapped up in his love for us. And on Maundy Thursday, we mourn as his friends and followers did. Then, triumphantly and with joy we celebrate Christ's resurrection on Easter Sunday and we claim his promise which says that this earthly life is not all there is, not even close. Because Christ died and rose, death no longer has the final say - we will have new life and be reunited with the one who loves us beyond our imagining or deserving.

To really appreciate the overwhelming grace and peace that come with each Easter Sunday, it is right that we first grieve for life as it would be without a God who saves. First, remember that we are each dust and to dust we shall each return. And then do those things which bring you closer to God, and allow God to bless you and keep you.

Let us pray: Gracious God, we give thanks that, because of your Son, death no longer has the final word. Create in us clean hearts and put new and right spirits within each of us, we pray. Amen.