

March 13, 2022 : Lent 2
All Saints', Littleton, NH
The Rev. Curtis Metzger

Genesis 15: 1-12, 17-18

Psalms 27: 1, 5-13

Philippians 3:17-4:1

Luke 13:31-35

We are 2 weeks into Lent and 3 weeks into the war in Ukraine. It makes one wonder about how we might use the discipline of Lent to focus our prayer life on that conflict and what actions we might take. This afternoon at 3pm at the Congregational Church will be a chance to do both as we gather for prayer for Ukraine and take up a collection to help the International Committee of the Red Cross help the suffering caused by the war. Actually, they've been active there since the separatist faction began a war in the Donbas in 2014.

I thought for something a little different, and since I spoke to you last week about the prayer offices in the monastery, which are the offices in the Prayer Book, I would do a little teaching on the prayer offices. They can be a little tedious at first, but once you get used to them, they provide a nice rhythm. At first it's a bit like learning scales as a musician – over and over again: do-re-me-fa-so-la-ti-do! They can be a little tricky to get the hang of so I'm not sure where I should start...hmmmm, well, 'let's start at the very beginning, a very good place to start'....[to the tune of 'Do-Re-Me' from The Sound of Music]

Morning Prayer, it is the first
And starts on page seven-ty-five,
Noon Day Prayer it is the next,
'Tis short, so do not dare complain,
Next is Evening Prayer at dusk
Even-song say some who sing,
Then the last to fall in line,
Is the prayer we call Compline!

Ha! Never say your rector is not ready for liturgical vaudeville! Well, a little humor to get us going. Take out your Prayer Books with me and I'll do a quick walk through with you. Turn to page 75 where Morning Prayer Rite II begins. Rite II, as you know, is the more contemporary rite, whereas Rite I for the prayer offices and Eucharist is the older version found in the 1928 Book of Common Prayer and has the thee and thou language. You'll note that there are scripture sentences that begin the service depending on the liturgical season, followed by confession, and then the Invitatory and Psalm on page 80. The invitatory includes the well-known Venite or Jubilate on page 82-83, or the Christ our Passover for Easter Season. Then on page 84 you'll note the Psalm or Psalms appointed for the day followed by the scripture lessons for the day.

You may ask, 'How do we find out the appointed Psalms and lessons?' Turn with me to page 934. This is the part of the Prayer Book that gives the Psalms and lessons in a two-year cycle. Interestingly, if you say the offices every day and follow the readings, you will read most of the Bible every 2 years. Turn to page 936. You will note that the lectionary begins with the first Sunday of Advent, since the liturgical year begins on that Sunday. The numbers next to the word 'Sunday' are the Psalms appointed for Morning Prayer, then separated by the thing that looks a bit like a cross and another set of numbers, which are the Psalms for Evening Prayer. The Scripture lessons are below that and you can read on or two lessons with Morning or Evening Prayer as you choose. Now, turning back to page 85, you will note there are a number of pages of canticle beginning with Canticle 8. Canticles 1-7 are in Morning Prayer Rite I, and can be used too. Canticles are read [or sung] between the lessons and you can pick and choose among them. The next section is The Prayers on page 97, starting with the Lord's Prayer, then some versicle and responses, then various collects (prayers), The General Thanksgiving, and the conclusion.

Noonday prayer follows, which is a relatively short service and everything you need is right there. Then, on page 109, follows An Order of Worship for the Evening, which is something of an abbreviated or alternative service format for Evening Prayer. The proper service of Evening Prayer follows that on page 115, and, much like Morning Prayer, has Psalms, lessons, canticles, and prayers. Lastly there is the service of Compline on page 127. This is a short late evening service that in a

compilation of several of the monastic evening offices and has become much loved in the church. One of my favorite prayer of the Prayer Book is in the service (p. 134):

Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this night, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, Lord Christ, give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous; and all for our love's sake. Amen.

And there you have the Prayer Book 'offices'. Again, they may seem very rote and prescribed, and tiresome, but only in the minds of the beholder. As you practice them and learn them, they can become touchstones of consistency and comfort. And, just as you learn the scales, but then go on to make beautiful music with diverse melodic lines, you can alter the service and incorporate things that are life-giving for you.

You may say, 'Hey, wait a minute, last week you were telling us about silent prayer and leaving the Prayer Book behind while practicing contemplative prayer!' Well, yes, but as I said last week there are different kinds of prayer and they all have their place. So I invite you to try both kinds of prayer. Let the Prayer Book prayer begin to shape you and form you, and then let holy contemplation in contemplative prayer renew, revive, and reform you in God's love.

Now let me take a few minutes to unpack this interesting bit of the gospel of Luke. This is a short conversation between Jesus and a couple of Pharisees, and then he goes off on thoughts about Jerusalem and what he believes will ultimately happen to him there. The Pharisees come to warn him that Herod may want to kill him. Remember that the Pharisees were kind of like the Jewish fundamentalists of the day. They would have had some things in common with Jesus, especially in regard to living in right relationship with God, only they thought it was all about strict adherence to the law. There were some Pharisees that were particularly attracted to Jesus, which in later stories included Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. Herod's fear of Jesus could have had two different reasons: one, he was a friend of John the Baptist, who he had beheaded, and two, there were people around Jesus using the word Messiah, which historically to the Jews, was a political liberator as well as a messenger from God. Herod held on to power by the grace of Rome, so he couldn't abide any political unrest. Jesus calls Herod a 'fox', which to us usually means someone cunning, but

in Rabbinic literature a fox was an animal that was a low-life and of no account.

He then goes on about Jerusalem, 'the city that kills the prophets', and you can hear the anguish in his voice when he compares himself to a mother hen wanting to shelter and protect her chicks. The ending statements most scholars believe were a gloss or an addition after Jesus referencing either his triumphal entry into Jerusalem or his resurrection; and 'blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord' is now part of our liturgy at the end of the Sanctus – the 'Holy, Holy' near the beginning of the Eucharistic prayer.

As I was contemplating this passage and Jesus' foreboding about Jerusalem and his path there, it made me wonder about President Zelensky. I wonder if, in his decision to stay in Kyiv, if he was having some similar premonitions, yet knew his was the right path to rally his country. Have you ever been in that situation? Where you knew what you had to do, and it was definitely the right thing, but you also saw it ending badly. This is where being well-formed in the faith and well-practiced in prayer can give you a steady hand on the tiller and an abiding peace through choppy waters. As in the first verse of the Psalm today: "The Lord is my light and my salvation: whom then shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom then shall I be afraid?"