

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

July 13, 2019

Community Prayer Service

Psalm 25:1-10

I love to cook. It's not uncommon for me to spend 1-2 hours in the kitchen preparing a meal. When I was more organized than I am now...you could find me every Wednesday evening sorting through culinary magazines, cookbooks, and countless files of recipes choosing just the right combination of meals for the week ahead. On Thursdays, I would go to the grocery store, a 30-minute drive from my home, and shop. With the cupboard stocked for the next 7 days, I felt this incredible sense of gratitude that each and every meal would be home-cooked, healthy, and delicious. Well, home-cooked and healthy were usually true...delicious was a little more precarious.

Whatever the result, I loved the process. But, I ALWAYS followed a recipe. Step by step with exact precision. I have never been one to "wing it" in the kitchen. I don't have an intuitive cooking gene. I can't imagine flavors melded together in the saute pan. Instead, I have to trust that the ingredients in the recipe are just right. That the steps are in order and that the cooking times and methods are spot on.

Recipes give me confidence to try new things and mostly, they turn out well. Even the mistakes can be modified to make a decent meal. The instructions help me have patience and perseverance to keep slicing, mixing and sauting until my culinary proficiency settles in.

Any skill takes practice...and with enough time and attention you are gradually able learn what to do.

I think the same is true of our faith. It takes practice to believe and it takes even more practice to apply what we believe. Faith, if it is to be anything other than words and clichés takes our commitment to studying, listening, learning, and above all, practicing.

So...if I start to think of the ways I learn and the ways I engage with something new I know I can't just read about it. I have to figure out some way to make the concept understandable to me, memorable, and applicable to my life.

Here's something fun...the ancient Hebrews understood our need to practice in order to get faith right and they often wrote sacred texts in acrostic form. That's a kind of poem where each line starts with a letter to build a word or phrase. Like in school, when we learned the color spectrum. Do you remember that one? It's Roy G. Biv. Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo, Violet. Or, there is the reverse order where you have a phrase that helps you remember the first letters of each word which stand for something else. As in "Every good boy does fine." EGBDF. The letter of the treble clef in music. I learned those in elementary school and I have never forgotten them.

They are the steps in a recipe, the instructions to help us get things right.

And so it is with Psalm 25. Although it might not look like it from our English translation, if you read this Psalm in Hebrew, you find that each line starts with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, in ascending order.

This Psalm was meant to be a teaching tool, a recipe of sorts, a list of instructions, to help people approach, learn and apply their faith. It was designed not just to read, but to memorize, to take deeply in and make it a part of one's own life.

The lessons in the acrostic were simple...

- 1) God provides order and meaning for our lives through structure, through law.
- 2) God forgives us of our sins.
- 3) God will always be with us no matter what.

These were instructions to be practiced over and over again. These were the things the Psalmist was trying to teach in a way that would not be forgotten.

God gives us structure, God forgives, God is with us.

We are not meant to “wing it” in this life. We are meant to follow God and to rely on God. We are meant to trust in our redemption and to find comfort in our salvation. The Psalmist reminds us to just follow the directions. Follow the rules. Give your life over to God who will love you and protect you beyond measure.

So, if your faith wavers, that's OK...come back to the rules, the structure, the guidelines God provides. If you make a mistake, no matter how big or how small...turn it over to God and ask for forgiveness. If you find yourself lonely, confused, hurt, broken...take all of your pain and remember that God is going to stand by you and love you through anything that you give him.

The Psalmist wanted the reader to know these lessons and practice these lessons. The same is true for us. Like any good recipe, if we follow the instructions, the result is usually just right. Comforting, nourishing, fulfilling.

Thanks be to God. Amen.