

**Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
September 26 & 27, 2015
Dee McIntosh
Psalm 62**

[Video begins.]

For me, prayer is instant. It's a gut level response to a need or maybe a call in my heart. It will be audible sometimes. Sometimes I just know that God is hearing me on a heart level, a gut level. Sometimes words aren't even uttered and I leave it in His hands and I think that's great. Prayer for me is never about language or efficiency or being verbose. I don't go to flowery words. I don't try to frame the prayer beforehand or write it out. I try to approach God with the need as I see it, as He is seeing it. I don't feel prayer is about results. I feel prayer is about bringing us to God and trusting Him for the results. It's enough to know that He hears.

The hardest time to pray is when your hands are dirty and you've got mud all over your face and you come to God and think He doesn't want to see you or hear from you. But He welcomes you with open arms. The hardest times to pray sometimes end up being the most fruitful and humbling. Sometimes life reduces you to a pressure point where prayer is the only thing that you can do and at some point, you have to pray. Prayer is an exercise that gets easier with use. Prayer is just uttering the things that are on your mind and heart quietly in a closet, in your car, wherever, but speaking them out.

[Video ends. To view, see link below]

This is our third week into a sermon series entitled He Knows Your Name and we're talking about prayer. I am beginning this time together with a question and the question is this: Where do you turn when life hurts? Where do you go? Who do you turn to when your life is a mess and in shambles? Where do you go when your finances are a mess? Where do you turn when on the outside, it looks like everything is fine, but the reality is that you know you are on the verge of financial ruin? Parents, where do you go when the self-centeredness of your teenager is causing discord in your house and you can't, for the life of you, figure out why they think the world revolves around them? Where do you go? Spouses, who do you turn to when your husband or wife is unwilling to reconcile? Where do you go when you get bad news? Who do you turn to when your health is failing?

Friends, I am excited to be here today because I love to talk about prayer. I love to pray. As Ken Foster said in that video, "Prayer is simple. It's just coming to God with a need." I think I've talked about this before, but I grew up in various church traditions. For a very long time, we were kind of like church-hoppers. More specifically, we were denomination-hoppers. It's one thing to be a church-hopper; it's another thing to hop through denominations. We started off Southern Baptist and then we became Black Baptists. For those of you who don't know, there is a big difference between the two. Then in my middle school years, we were Pentecostal, but we

weren't just Pentecostal, we were Church of God in Christ Pentecostal. And to make things a little bit more confusing, we were Jamaican Pentecostal. Then we went back to being Southern Baptist and then we went to United Methodist and then I think my mom said, "Forget about it. We're just going to be non-denominational." That was kind of the end of my church hopping, but all of those different denominations influenced the way that I view prayer. They impacted the way that I think about prayer. I think for many of us, the churches we have grown up in or the expectations we place on ourselves form the idea of what we think prayer should look like and sound like and feel like.

For me, the most formative time in my life was during my middle school years when we were in that Jamaican Pentecostal swing. I often thought to myself, I can't pray because I can't pray like them. Their prayers were like exegetical Scripture, like exegetical sermons, you know what I mean? Someone would get up and pray and it would be like a sermon with an introduction on who God is, an exegetical survey of what God has done, and then they would close with a benediction. I thought, I can't pray because I don't pray like them.

Now what I'm going to do is show a video clip to give you a more realistic portrayal of what I mean in terms of what I thought prayer looked like. I know for us, maybe not *us*, but for Norwegians, for Scandinavians, this is going to be a stretch for you all so I'm saying that ahead of time. But this is like, right up my alley. This is what prayer looked like to me. This video clip is from a play about these two couples who come together on a couples retreat and on the retreat with them is a deacon of their church. Now, the deacon also happens to be the father of one of the women. They are sitting down at lunch and they ask the deacon, Curtis Payne, or Poppy as his daughter calls him, to pray. Let's take a look at this.

[Video shown.]

I love that. Whenever I'm feeling down, I literally go on YouTube and I watch that over and over and over and over again. It's great. This is what I mean when I say their prayers are like a sermon. The deacon starts off with an introduction of who God is. Then he goes into God putting a leaf on a limb and a limb on a branch and a branch on a tree and a tree on some roots and the roots in the dirt and the dirt in a hole and the hole in the ground. Then he goes right into giving thanks to God for chicken. Isn't that great? I thank God for chicken often as well. But what I love about that clip is the fact that every person at the table has the ability to pray to God and yet they defer to the person who is the deacon. Isn't that something? They defer to the person who is the professional pray-er. I think oftentimes we do that very same thing. We have the expectation that prayer is something devout Christians do, something the staff does, something pastors do. This is something that we wrestle with because of our idea of what prayer really is.

At the heart of this sermon series, that I believe John Crosby is trying to get us to see, is that prayer is not just for the professionals and that we need to de-professionalize prayer in the church. I love what Ken said in the very beginning of that clip. He said that prayer is not about flowery words. It's not about how efficient you are. It's not about how verbose you are. It is simply coming to God with a need. It is something that all of us can do. This morning we are going to look at Psalm 62. Oh, friends, I love Psalm 62! I am already an Old Testament junkie. The Psalms are Scripture that I spent a lot of time in growing up. My mom used to always make us memorize Scripture and the Psalms are what she often would make us memorize.

Psalm 62 speaks to me in a way that some of the other Psalms don't. What I love about Psalm 62 is that the Psalmist is not coming to God with the façade that everything is fine. The Psalmist isn't coming to God all polished and manicured. The Psalmist comes to God broken and hurting and vulnerable, going to the one person he knows can be his refuge. It is real and to the point. I'm going to read verses 1 through 7 and when we get to verse 8, I'm going to have us all read together.

[Dee:] ¹ Truly my soul silently waits for God;
From Him comes my salvation.
² He only is my rock and my salvation;
He is my defense;
I shall not be greatly moved.
³ How long will you attack a man?
You shall be slain, all of you,
Like a leaning wall and a tottering fence.
⁴ They only consult to cast him down from his high position;
They delight in lies;
They bless with their mouth,
But they curse inwardly.
⁵ My soul, wait silently for God alone,
For my expectation is from Him.
⁶ He only is my rock and my salvation;
He is my defense;
I shall not be moved.
⁷ In God is my salvation and my glory;
The rock of my strength,
And my refuge, is in God.

Let's read this together.

[All:] ⁸ Trust in Him at all times, you people;
Pour out your heart before Him;
God is a refuge for us.

Let's say that last part again.

[All:] God is a refuge for us.

The Psalmist is undergoing here what he feels like is persecution. The people he loved and thought loved him are now consulting to attack him. They are spreading lies about him. It reminds me of this song that my grandma's Southern Baptist church used to sing. It goes a little something like, "I've been lied on, mistreated, talked about, and cheated." That song comes from this passage.

⁴ They only consult to cast him down from his high position;
They delight in lies;
They bless with their mouth,
But they curse inwardly.

The Psalmist thought the people he loved had his best interests in mind and yet they are consulting about him to pull him down from his high place. There is a lot of debate about whether or not this is King David. If it is, in fact, King David, I think that we can realize why he would feel like this. Remember with me about King David and his jacked-up family. His family had some serious issues. King David's son Absalom wanted to kill him. His own son, flesh of his flesh, blood of his blood, consulted with other people and pursued David to take his life.

I know that Minnesota niceness thing really is true. We really are as nice as people think we are. We don't do this at all. We don't smile at people but internally are like, "Urrrr, I need to stay away." We don't do that at all. Ladies, I know for a fact that we don't gossip about our friends. Never, right? We don't hang out with friends and then go out and tell our husbands, "Oh, my gosh, she has so many issues." We don't do that at all. This is only something that happens in the text. This is only something that happens in the Bible. But whether or not this is David, it is clear that the Psalmist is in utter despair. And yet in the midst of the gravity of his situation, the Psalmist confesses,

⁵ My soul, wait silently for God alone,
For my expectation is from Him.

This confession is the fruit of the wrestling of his soul in prayer. It is one of the finest testimonies in the Psalms of the true spirit of prayer. The Psalmist is going through a tough time and he turns to God and says, "God, I am hurting and I am in pain, but truly, my soul is still turned only to You." Let's talk about what it means for God to be our refuge. I had you repeat verse 8.

⁸ Trust in Him at all times, you people;
Pour out your heart before Him;
God is a refuge for us.

What does that mean? What does it look like for God to be a refuge for us? I think in the last two or three weeks, we have talked a lot about refuge or at least we have thought about it, especially in light of the Syrian conflict. When the images of that young boy washed up on the shore crashed the internet, we thought about what it actually means for refugees to find refuge. What does it mean for people who are in danger to find safety? I don't know if you know this, but the Twin Cities is home to a lot of refugee groups. We have Hmong and Karen. We have Burmese. We have people from Somalia as well as Liberians and Americo-Liberians. Minnesota is home to the largest population of Liberians outside of the country of Liberia. When the Vice-President of Liberia came to the United States, his first stop was Minnesota.

The thing that strikes me about the fact that we are home to refugees is that we are in a place where we are constantly in conversation about what it looks like for people to find refuge. When the dictator Charles Taylor took over power in Liberia in the eighties, stories go that he chopped off the heads of all the government officials and forced kids to play soccer with the decapitated heads. If you look online and do some research, you will see that over two million Somalis have been displaced since the early nineties. Two million people. What does it mean for people to find refuge? What does it mean for them to be safe? And what does it mean for us? What does it look like for you and me to find refuge when our lives are crazy and chaotic and hectic? When we can't seem to reconcile the way we desire things to be with the way that they are, who do we turn to? God is a refuge for us and I thank God He is a refuge who never forsakes us, who never leaves us. God is a refuge who will never say to us, "Why don't you just go back to where

you came from?" Let's talk about what a refuge is. Let's look at the Hebrew. Let's do a little investigation of what it means to be a refuge. What does that mean Scripturally?

First, a refuge is a place of safety, but a refuge is only as safe as it is strong. The Bible talks over and over and over again about how God is a stronghold, a fortress. God is safe because He is so strong. I want to show a picture up here. [Slide shown.] I love this picture. In the ancient Near East, the ruins on top of a plateau like this would have been a castle. The people would build these castles, these fortresses, up on plateaus with the idea that the plateau would guard them from their enemies. There was no C4 in ancient times. There was no dynamite and no way to knock the castle down. There was no way to penetrate it. The idea was that if castles would sit up there, then they would be a stronghold where people could be safe. When enemies would line up around it, the people inside were safe. God is a refuge because He is safe. God is a stronghold. God is a fortress. He is unbreakable and He is impenetrable.

The second thing is simple. God is a place of supply. How many of you remember the tornado that hit north Minneapolis in 2011? Hands? Anybody remember this? My husband and I, our family, we live literally four blocks away from where the tornado did most of its damage. I never will forget it. Sirens went off. I get our then one-year old son from his room on the main floor and we run upstairs to get my three-month old baby. Then we go running down into our basement and I think to myself, "Oh, God, if this tornado knocks down our house, we are completely unprepared." My first thought as a mom of a three-month old was, "I have no diapers. Jesus, give me some time. I've got to go get some diapers. I have no diapers." But beyond that, there was no water. There was no food. There were no candles. There were no flashlights. We had no batteries. We had no form of communication. We were completely unprepared for the tornado.

A refuge is worthless unless it is able to supply you with everything you need while you are staying in it. God is a refuge for you because God can supply you with everything you need while you are going through whatever it is you are going through. He has everything you need. If you need love, He has an abundance of it. If you need grace, He has an abundance of it. If you need forgiveness, it is already there. My favorite Scripture passage, I say that all the time but every Scripture passage is my favorite, is Philippians 4:19 and it says,

¹⁹ But my God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

Amen. Amen. Amen! Everything you need is in God!

The third thing about a refuge is that a refuge is a place that is reliable. Where do we go when tornado sirens go off? Where do you run? No one stays upstairs in their room, do they? Why not? This is not a trick question. I'm really asking. Because when a tornado comes through your house, it's going to knock that top floor off, isn't it? We go to the basement because we know that is the place in the house that cannot be picked up by the tornado. When everything in our lives is going crazy, when the trees are flying, when the cars have been picked up by the wind, when our house is turned into nothing but debris, we know that there is one place that is immovable and that is our basement. God is like that. God is reliable precisely because when everything else is moving, God is not. He cannot be moved when everything in our lives is going crazy. He is reliable because he's not us. He's reliable because he's not broken. He's not sinful. He's not unfaithful.

I love Psalm 62 and I love it for this reason. Again, I love, love, love Scripture. How many times can I say that in a sermon? I love Scripture and I love Psalm 62 because Psalm 62 does a great job of contrasting the brokenness and fallenness of man with the faithfulness of God. God is strong where man is weak. God is reliable when men are undependable. God never turns His back on us the way that people do. God is incorruptible where man stumbles. Where we trust in riches and we trust in our own abilities, God is not like us. God is all-powerful. I love that contrast in the Psalms where it talks about men of high degree, people of power. It's talking about all of us in the sense that we think we control our lives. We think we can control and manipulate and do things that benefit us but the reality is, there is only one in all of creation who is all-powerful and that is God. God is reliable because He is not man.

Back in the Pentecostal circles, they used to always say, "God is not like man that He should lie. God is not like son of man that He shall change His mind. He will not forsake us." God is our refuge and so this morning, I want you to think about if you actually go to Him. Do you turn to God when life hurts? For those activators and maybe controllers in the room, you may be saying, "All right, Dee, God is a refuge. What does that look like then? What does that mean practically and tangibly?" What does it mean **for God to be a refuge for our lives**? Two things that come right out of verse 8.

⁸ Trust in Him at all times, you people;
Pour out your heart before Him;
God is a refuge for us.

The first is that **we have to trust in God**. Trusting in God simply means to depend upon God's character. We just talked about the difference between God and man and said that God is trustworthy. Now, I think in my life, and maybe some of you are like this, I say all the time that I trust in God. On the one hand, I go, "Yep. Got it. I trust in God." But on the other hand, if I am honest, I am doing everything that I can to control the situation, to influence the situation, so that it turns out the way that I want it to turn out. I say, "Oh, God, I need You in this relationship. I need You to reconcile it. It is messy and I am hurting. I love this person and I want to mend the brokenness." But on the other hand, I am doing everything I can to control the person, control the conversation, control what they do, manipulate them so that I can get out of the relationship precisely what I want. I know I'm the only person who does this. I know I'm the only person who says that I trust in God with the one hand but on the other hand, I'm kind of trusting in my own ability.

What I have come to realize is that I think there are three big reasons why we are so unwilling to let go of our control. The first is that many of us want to know if God really is trustworthy. We struggle with that. Is God really trustworthy? The second is fear. We are afraid. We have been controlling for our entire lives and now this idea that we have to actually let go of control. Our society pushes us to trust in our own abilities. Our culture is about self, self, self, and now you're telling me I have to let go of a little bit of that control. And the third thing, I think, is that many of us struggle with shame and guilt. "But, Dee, if you only knew how I really am, if you only knew what I did in my past, if you only knew how broken I am and how much I am hurting. I can't trust in God because I'm too ashamed."

From my experience, I think we can't rely on how we feel when it comes to God. When it comes to this idea of trusting in God, it is not about our emotions. We rely too heavily on how we feel. If I'm honest with you guys, I don't feel God every day. I don't know about you. Maybe someone in

here feels God every day and if you do, please email me so we can have a conversation. I'd love to figure out how to do that. I don't feel Him every day. I don't feel like He's really working in the relationships I want Him to work in every day. I don't feel like God is always working on my behalf. We rely too heavily on how we feel.

If we want to know whether or not God is trustworthy, we have to go to Scripture. We have to go to the foundation upon which we stand and that is the Word of God that is living and true. The Word of God says to us, I'm going to paraphrase this, that while we were yet sinning, God in His love did the only thing that God could possibly do. He put Himself on the cross. Amen, somebody? That's the good news. The Bible says we were enemies with God and God in His love still chose to get up on a cross so that we could be forgiven. God is always loving. He is always faithful. He is always caring. I love 1st John where it says,

¹⁶We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another [1st John 3:16.]

Most of us would sacrifice for people that we love. A few of us would do it for people we just like. But how many of us really would sacrifice for people that we hate, for people who are our enemies, for people who are always in opposition to us? God has proven His character in doing the very thing that so many of us would never do. It is time to let go of control and truly trust in God. For some of you, it is time for you to just let it go. Let it go and let God do what only God can do. For those of you who struggle with shame and guilt, I have a Scripture verse that I think you need to tattoo in your memory. This is a reminder for all of us.

¹ There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus [Romans 8:1].

It's already been taken care of, past, present, and future. That's the good news. No matter what you do and how your life goes, it is already covered. God is trustworthy. Will you trust Him and will you let go?

So if God is going to be a refuge in our lives, first, we have to trust in God. And second, **we need to pour out our hearts and souls to Him.** But we have to go to Him. That's the thing about a refuge. I have a six-year-old and a four-year-old. I love them to pieces. They are a little messy and a little chaotic, but I love them to pieces. In their room, we have a really big toy box. It's about yay high. The idea for the toy box is that only the big toys go in the big toy box. I say this so much that I could just go through my whole spiel with my kids. "Okay, Levi and Jesaia, Listen to Mommy. The big toys go into the big toy box and the little toys go into the compartments. That's why they're there." But my kids never listen. They put all of their toys into the big toy box so when they are playing and they need a toy, Levi gets one side and Jesaia gets the other and they pour the whole thing on the floor. The toy could be the second one from the top and they will still pour the whole thing all over the floor. It drives me nuts, but this image of pouring out that my kids do is precisely what we are talking about when we say we need to pour out our hearts. In Hebrew, the idea of pouring out a cup of water is to turn the cup all the way over. This is what God is calling us to do. This is what the Psalmist is exhorting us to do. Trust in God and pour it all out. Tell Him everything.

One thing that I realized in that tornado was that my basement was worthless unless my family and I went down into it. It doesn't work if we don't go there. You have to actually go to God. You

have to go into the refuge. He's not going to force you to do it. God is a gentleman. He's not going to force you, but the refuge won't work unless you go to Him, unless you pour out your heart before Him. One of my favorite quotes is by Henri Nouwen. I love this thing. I read this to myself all the time. It says,

Dear God,
I am so afraid to open my clenched fists!
Who will I be when I have nothing left to hold onto?
Who will I be when I stand before you with empty hands?
Please help me to gradually open my hands
and to discover that I am not what I own,
but what you want to give me.

This is an example of pouring out your heart to God. Last week John talked a little bit about Martin Luther. For those of you who know about Martin Luther, you know that he struggled with severe depression his entire life. This great man of faith, this reformer, who transformed the faith, struggled not only with depression, but this idea of sin. He wrestled with it. One of my favorite quotes from him is just ten words and I say this to myself over and over and over again. It's very simple. "Here I stand. I can do no other. Help me." This is what it looks like to pour out your heart before God. If God is to be a refuge for us, we must trust in Him and let go of our ability to control the situation and we must also pour out our hearts.

So I end this time the very way that I began it by asking you, who do You turn to when your life hurts? Who do you turn to when your life is a mess? Who do you turn to when things get complicated? Where do you turn? You may or may not have noticed that there are cards at the end of your aisle. If you haven't, I'm going to say now to go ahead and pass those down. Last week you had an opportunity to write on cards one thing that *I give thanks for* or one thing you ask *the gift of forgiveness for*. We had an opportunity to pin them on the letters [He Knows] up here. You may have also noticed that there are cards all around the altar today.

I was struck last week when I was doing a devotional on 2nd Kings. In 2nd Kings, it talked about King Hezekiah. Now King Hezekiah had received a threatening letter from one of his enemies, the Assyrian king, who told Hezekiah that they were coming to destroy the Israelite people. King Hezekiah didn't pray words. He didn't say anything lengthy. He took the letter and he put it on the altar before the Lord. This morning I am asking us to write down on these cards something that you are trusting in God for. Now, friends, let me just issue a challenge. It is so easy to write something superficial on a card, but I want to challenge you to do as my kids would do: pour it all out. Spread it all across the floor and put it on that card. When you are ready, I am going to ask that you get up and take your cards and lay them all across the steps. And at the end of that, I will pray for us.

Link to video shown during this service: <https://vimeo.com/140668478>

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.