

“PRAYER, GOD’S KIND CONDESCENSION.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Psalm 5:1-2; Psalm 28:1-2; Daniel 10:12

Introduction.

How many of you have heard of Sarah Cynthia Sylvia Stout? In our family one of our most favorite Shel Silverstein poems is about her.

Sarah Cynthia Sylvia Stout would not take the garbage out
She'd scour the pots and scrub the pans
Candy the yams and spice the hams
And though her daddy would scream and shout
She simply would not take the garbage out

And so, it piled up to the ceilings
Coffee grounds, potato peelings
Brown bananas, rotten peas, chunks of sour cottage cheese
That filled the can and covered the floor, cracked the window and blocked the door

At last the garbage reached so high that it finally touched the sky
And all the neighbors moved away
And none of her friends would come to play
And finally, Sarah Cynthia Stout said
"OK, I'll take the garbage out!"

But then, of course, it was too late
The garbage reached across the state
From New York to the Golden Gate
And there, in the garbage she did hate
Poor Sarah met an awful fate

That I cannot, right now relate
Because the hour is much too late
But children, remember Sarah Stout
And always take the garbage out

Who likes to take the garbage out? How many of us think of taking the garbage out as one of those necessary evils, one of those tedium's of daily life? How many of us put it off for as long as possible, perhaps hoping someone else will do it?

Have you ever considered another perspective? Have any of you ever thought about garbage theologically? I know you are probably thinking, leave it to a pastor to actually think about garbage theologically, doctrinally, Biblically.

But, the truth is we should think of everything theologically since everything in all creation is from God, by God, through God, for God and to God as Romans 11:36 says.

The reason we don't think this way about garbage is because taking the garbage out is so utterly routine, dull, boring, unimportant; it doesn't even rise to the level of conscious thought.

Let me offer you a different perspective. Garbage is not a dull, necessary, unimportant part of our existence. It is in fact a divine blessing, and we should view it as a daily sacrament because it is a sign of God's gracious, abundant provision.

People who have no garbage have no provisions. If nothing is coming in, nothing is going out.

With bacon rinds and chicken bones, drippy ins of ice cream cones
Prune pits, peach pits, orange peel
Gluppy glumps of cold oat meal, pizza crust and withered greens
And soggy beans and tangerines and crust of black burned buttered toast
And gristly bits of beefy roast

These are all signs that our Father in heaven is feeding us. These are all signs of God's answer to our prayer, "give us this day our daily bread." He has answered that pray so abundantly that we have to carry bags of leftovers out to our garbage cans and big trucks have to come up and down our streets to carry it all away.

Who ever thought of a landfill as a sign of God's constant, faithful, generous abundant provision, day in and day out, year in and year out. But it is so routine we never give it a thought.

Prayer become like garbage when it becomes a thoughtless, ordinary routine.

When we read stories in the Bible about God hearing and answering prayer we give it no extra thought, we think it is just routine, no big deal.

Judges 13:9 And God listened to the voice of Manoah.

I Samuel 1:17-20, 26-28 God hears and answers Hannah's prayer.

Psalms 66:16 The Lord has heard my cry, the Lord accepts my prayer.

Daniel 10:12 The Lord heard Daniel's prayer.

Luke 1:13 The angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard.”

All of that sound perfectly normal, right? We pray, God listens, done.

If I were to ask you, “does God answer prayer?” how would you respond? Yes! Of course He does. We are so used to God hearing and answering that we miss the miracle, the divine provision, the theological significance of a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God.

But have you ever noticed how the Psalmist don't take prayer for granted, as if God answering prayer was a matter of routine? Hearing and answering prayer is anything but routine. Listen to how the psalmists begin many of their prayers:

Psalm 5:1-2 Give ear to my words, O Lord; consider my groaning.

2 Give attention to the sound of my cry, my King and my God, for to you do I pray.

Psalm 28:1-2 To you, O Lord, I call; my rock, be not deaf to me, lest, if you be silent to me, I become like those who go down to the pit.

2 Hear the voice of my pleas for mercy, when I cry to you for help.

Psalm 83:1 O God, do not keep silence; do not hold your peace or be still, O God!

Psalm 102:1-2 Hear my prayer, O Lord; let my cry come to you!

2 Do not hide your face from me in the day of my distress!

Incline your ear to me; answer me speedily in the day when I call!

These are not the prayers of someone who takes prayer or God for granted, just part of our daily routine.

The glorious condescension. The gracious condescension.

What is man, but a microscopic speck of dust in God's vast creation? What is God that He would even notice or care? God has purposefully, intentionally stooped down to earth and He has purposefully and intentionally made us in His image, He us gives special care and attention.

Luke 12:24 Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds!

The point is in God's view there is no comparison between all the creatures on earth and man. God's individual personal attention and care is a kind of condescension that is beyond fathoming.

There is nothing boring, dull, routine, normal about prayer. It is a miracle of grace, a sign of God's daily grace and provision. The very means of our provision.

When the Psalmist cries out for God to hear he is voicing a kind of fear. If God doesn't hear and listen to our prayers and answer them, it's all over folks. Everything depends on God being a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God. Without this there is no hope.

Every time God hears and answers it is a miracle of grace, mercy, undeserved kindness opened up to us by the miracle of Jesus' sacrifice and blood and righteousness.

Never think of prayer and especially God's answers to our prayer with a yawn. Don't make light of it, don't trivialize it, don't you be condescending about prayer.

Prayer is a gracious and glorious condescension. The living God, the creator God, the Almighty King of the universe stoops down low to listen to our nouns and verbs, adjectives and adverbs, our run on sentences and broken phrases, our groans, tears, pleadings and joys.

And the Psalmist shows his fear is not enough to silence him. There is a glimmer of hope, of trust, of confidence.

In Psalm 5 he calls Yahweh my king and my God. He appeals to the sovereign Lord of the universe as his king and his God. What faith to address the almighty king as his own king. The Psalmist knows he is going to the top, to the final court of appeal.

We are not aliens or strangers to God, we are His children, His subjects, His people.

In Psalm 28 he calls Yahweh "my rock" which actually is a bit ironic, seeing as how rocks are deaf. But he uses the word rock to imply security and stability.

Remember when Moses struck the rock and water gushed out? Yahweh associated Himself with that rock, He is the source of all we need, our sustenance and sufficiency.

Begging God to listen doesn't mean we doubt, or we lack faith that God hears. It means we don't presume, we don't assume, we don't take it for granted, we understand how great a gap there is between God and us and we are humbled that such a God would even consider to take thought of us.

In the end we believe what God has revealed about Himself. He delights in us as His children and gladly condescends to us and our finiteness and our needs. In fact He has created us finite and needy for this very reason, that we would turn to Him in prayer daily.

Matthew 7:11 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

Conclusion and application.

There is nothing normal, routine, ordinary about your prayers. There is nothing ordinary about the miraculous, glorious condescension of the God of the universe stooping down to listen.

Your prayers are never in vain. When you pray, *nothing never happens*. Did you hear that? When you pray, nothing never happens. Not nothing ever happens, but nothing never happens. In other words, something always happens. God always hears and God always answers. He always does more than we ask or imagine. Answering prayer is how God works in our world.

Pray knowing God hears and answers. After you pray give thanks to God for hearing and answering, confident that whatever the answer it is not nothing, but something and that something is what is good and best for you.

Psalm 116:1-2 I love the Lord, because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy.
2 Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live.

And may we start this year calling on Him more than we ever have, daily experiencing this gracious and glorious means of miraculous grace. Don't wait until its too late. Pray as if your life depends on it. Every day in 2022.

Prayer: Gracious Lord, you are, indeed, enthroned above the highest heaven. You are great beyond greatness, glorious beyond glory. Yet, in love and mercy, you look down upon us. And not only look, but reach down to help us. Every day you bend down to hear and answer our daily, routine prayers in a truly miraculous way.

Father, thank you that you are the one true prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God and that you only give good gifts. Help us to see your answers when they aren't what we asked for or wanted. And all of this we ask, believing in the strong name of Jesus our Savior, Amen.