



**Pray that the Holy Spirit continues to
Lead Us into Repentance and Faith!**

Sermon | Matthew 21:23:32 | Pentecost 18



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Immanuel Lutheran Church
89 Mountainview Rd S Georgetown, ON

Pray that the Holy Spirit continues to Lead Us into Repentance and Faith!

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

The sermon for today draws from the Gospel according to St. Matthew.

Dear Saints, as Christians we are taught to pray daily, at least three times a day, and whenever we leave our homes and return again.

If you open our hymnals on the front page, the very first text is "*Prayers for Worship.*"

When you glance through the contents page, the Daily Office section has prayers for morning, afternoon, evening, and bedtime.

The final text on the rear-inside of the hymnal is "*The Lord's Prayer*."

Someone has aptly said, "*the life of a Christian is a life of prayer*."

We pray daily and we pray for many things. There are many petitions in our daily prayers. We pray for each other. And most often we pray for our own selves.

The Psalm that we read together, in unison, carries some beautiful petitions that we use in our prayers.

When we pray, we ask God to remember us in His mercy and in His steadfast love. We pray to Him not to remember our sins or any transgressions for His goodness' sake. (Psalm 25:6-7).

Yet there are two verses in this Psalm to which I would especially draw your attention.

Please feel free to open your hymnals to Psalm 25 again and read through verses four and five.

Here the Psalmist prays to God petitioning for himself:

“Make me to know Your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation.” (Psalm 25:4-5).

By praying these words, the Psalmist confesses that he cannot know God’s ways by his own wisdom, nor walk in God’s paths by his own strength.

Left to himself, he is not only incapable of following the Lord’s truth, but like every fallen child of Adam, unwilling to do so.

And this prayer of the Psalmist, especially these two verses, is precisely the prayer that the chief priests and the elders in today’s Gospel refused to pray.

In today's Gospel we heard how the chief priests and the elders confronted Jesus and asked Him: "*By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?*" (Matthew 21:23)

It is always helpful to consider the context when we read the Scripture.

So, what then had Jesus done that prompted the chief priests and the elders to ask such a question?

To answer that, we must briefly retrace our Lord's steps during the days immediately preceding this conversation.

A few days ago, Jesus made a triumphant entry into Jerusalem. There was a huge crowd that welcomed Him as He came mounted on a donkey. They spread their cloaks and palm leaves on the road and sang Hosannas, shouting at the top of their voices.

And when Jesus entered the temple, He overturned the tables of moneychangers and pigeon sellers, telling them: *“It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you make it a den of robbers.”* (Matthew 21:13).

Then the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them all. After all this, He left the temple for Bethany, another city near Jerusalem.

The next morning when Jesus returned to the temple in Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders confronted Him.

It is true that they possessed extensive knowledge of Scripture. They were the guardians of the rituals, traditions, and the Mosaic Law.

But they believed they *already knew* God’s ways. They believed they *already understood* God’s truth.

They possessed knowledge, but knowledge alone does not create faith. They knew the Scriptures, yet they refused to believe what the Scriptures testified about Christ. They surrounded Jesus not to learn from Him but to judge Him.

Instead of realizing their fault and repenting when Jesus cleansed the temple, they resented Him for doing it.

Instead of rejoicing that God's house was being restored to its proper purpose—a house of prayer—they were offended by Jesus.

His actions exposed what they had allowed to happen under their watch.

And Jesus exposed their unbelief fully by asking a counter-question concerning John the Baptist's baptism.

The chief priests and the elders refused to answer.

They were not seeking the truth but protecting themselves.

If they acknowledged John's baptism as being from heaven, they would stand condemned for rejecting his message. Yet they also feared the crowds if they denied him. Therefore, knowing the truth, they refused to confess it.

Dear Saints, outwardly, these men appeared to be defenders of God's Law. They wore the right vestments, held the right offices, taught the Scriptures, and commanded respect from the people.

Yet, when God's own Son stood before them—the One whose sandals John the Baptist himself could not untie—they were unwilling to acknowledge Him.

They rejected what the Scriptures proclaimed concerning the Messiah.

They rejected the work of the Holy Spirit, who through John's preaching had brought tax collectors and prostitutes to repentance, faith, and the forgiveness of sins.

But perhaps I have been too eager to condemn the chief priests and the elders.

I must also examine my own heart. Shouldn't I be recognizing myself in them?

By nature, we also resist being taught by God. We also prefer to judge God's Word, or to judge others by it, rather than allowing God's Word to judge us.

We also cling to our own wisdom and righteousness.

When we pray for ourselves, we are often preoccupied with what we want rather than what we truly need. We ask for comfort, success, and relief from our troubles.

Yet how often do we pray that the Lord would teach us
His ways and lead us in His truth?

We ought to pray that the Lord would make His ways
known to us when our lives pass through turbulent times,
and that He would teach us His paths so that we may
press forward in steadfast faith.

Psalm 25 is the outcry of a sinner who is mindful of his
sins and repentant. The Psalmist acknowledges his failure
to keep God's Word and confesses his need for the Lord's
mercy.

Therefore, he turned to the life-giving Word of God,
praying that the Lord would keep him in the truth, for He
alone is the God of his salvation.

The chief priests believed they no longer needed
teaching. The Psalmist knew he desperately did.

Therefore, Jesus answers the chief priests and the elders with a parable that reveals God's saving truth.

One son refuses his father's command but later repents and does what his father asks. The other son speaks respectfully and appears obedient, but his actions reveal a different heart.

With this parable, Jesus is not merely teaching a moral lesson about obedience. He is exposing the difference between outward religion and true inner repentance.

Dear Saints, this is the comforting truth of the Gospel. Jesus did not come into the world to save those who consider themselves righteous.

He came to save sinners who are brought to repentance by His Word. The tax collectors and prostitutes entered God's kingdom because they heard God's Word, repented of their sins, and believed His promise of mercy.

The same mercy is extended to us today. When God's Word exposes our pride, our self-righteousness and our unwillingness to be taught, Christ does not cast us away. He does not deal with us according to our sins, but according to His grace and mercy.

Instead, He calls us again to repentance and faith. He invites us to confess our sins and to receive His forgiveness.

For this very reason, the Son of God came into our flesh and blood. He willingly went to the cross and carried the sins of the whole world. There He suffered God's judgment in our place. He shed His holy and precious blood for our forgiveness. And on the third day He rose again victorious over sin, death, and the devil.

Now the risen Lord continues to receive repentant sinners. He speaks His absolution. He nourishes His Church with His Word and Sacraments.

He teaches us through His Holy Spirit and keeps us in true faith.

Therefore, whenever we pray, let us ask not only for daily bread and earthly blessings, but also that the Holy Spirit would continually lead us in God's truth, preserve us in repentance, and keep our eyes fixed on Christ, the God of our salvation.

So, let us pray that the Holy Spirit continues to lead us into repentance and faith.

Now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, now and forever. **Amen.**

Vijay Samuel