

“Praying the Bible”

Date: June 1, 2014

Place: Lakewood UMC

Texts: 2 Timothy 3:14-16; Isaiah 43: 2-3a,4a, 5-7

Theme: Prayer, *Lectio Divina*, Scriptural formation

Today, we conclude our sermon series on prayer, by taking a look at an ancient prayer form called *lectio divina*. *Lectio* has been around for centuries, but is only recently being rediscovered. The words *Lectio Divina* have been translated in various ways:

Spiritual Reading. Holy Reading, or Reading of the Divine Word. It's different from other kinds of Bible study where you read and analyze what you've read. Instead it involves the reader savoring a particular Bible text with “patient playfulness,” as one author put it.

It's a way of praying that allows the Bible to guide your thoughts. If traditional prayer is us speaking to God, *Lectio Divina* is a way of praying that allows God to speak to us.

It's not complicated; it's not hard to do, and it truly deepens a person's relationship with God. If traditional Bible study is meant for *information*, praying the Bible is meant for *formation*, allowing the Holy Spirit to form us, to change us, to transform us into the people God wants us to be.

Lectio Divina is a way of reading the Bible prayerfully and reflectively. We read with an attitude of seeking meaning directly from the text, with personal application for our lives. It's *prayerful* listening for divine inspiration from the Bible. And anyone can do it.

However, it does take practice. After this sermon, I plan to offer four weeks of Tuesday-evening practice. We'll meet at 7pm in the

library to prayerfully listen for God's voice, hidden in the Scriptures. We'll get started On June 10th. All are invited.

So, how do you "do" *Lectio Divina*? Well, you, or someone else reads the particular passage aloud four times. After each reading you pause. After the first reading, try to answer the question: "What does the text say? What caught your attention?" Don't analyze, simply allow the text to speak to you. "What word, phrase or image comes to mind as you hear the Word for the first time?"

After the second reading, focus on any particular phrase or image to which you feel drawn. "What does the text say to you, personally?"

After the third reading, shift from talking with yourself about the text to talking to God. "What do you want to say to God, in response to what you heard?"

After the fourth reading, enter into a time of silence to rest deeply in God's loving presence. Release yourself and pray to God in childlike trust. "What difference might the text make in your life?" Tell God.

In your bulletin insert is a guide to *lectio divina* that we used at an InterChurch Ministries event. We provide it for you today to take home and use in your own prayer life. Where the words are specific to ICM, adapt them to your own life, and don't be distracted by the ICM ministries reference.

Now, the best way to learn a new prayer style is to practice it. So, I invite you to get out the prayer guide in your bulletin and turn to the page with long blank lines on it, put there for you to write down your responses. Get in a comfortable position, and prepare to prayer.

“Lord God, we ask your Holy Spirit to be with us as we listen to the reading of your Holy Word. By the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, speak to each one of us, this day, the word that we need to hear. Open our blocked ears, and allow us to hear your voice, we pray. Amen.”

1. Hear the word of God, speaking through the text of Isaiah 43: 2-7. (Read it out loud to the congregation).

Open your eyes, now, and write down on your paper, or think to yourself, “What word or phrase grasped your attention?”

2. Read it again: Isaiah 43:2-7. Open your eyes. This time reflect on these questions, “What does this text say to you, personally? What could God be saying to you?” Feel free to write your thoughts on the paper provided.

3. Read it again: Isaiah 43:2-7. Open your eyes. This time, pray to God. Write down your prayer, if you wish. Tell God what this passage evokes in you. What do you want to say to God?

4. Read it again: Isaiah 43:2-7. Open your eyes. Remain in a time of silence; rest deeply in God’s loving presence. Release yourself to God. In childlike trust, pray to God, how might you be different as a result of reading this text?

Lectio Divina, Reading the Divine Word: Not informational Bible study, but formational Bible reading. We allow God to speak to our hearts as we prayerfully listen for God’s voice. May God bless us all as we seek to draw closer to our loving God. Amen? Amen.