

An All-Encompassing Prayer for A New Year

On this first Lord's Day of 2014, I want to commend to you a prayer to pray as we seek to follow Jesus into His new year. It is one of the shortest prayers anyone can ever pray. But short though it may be, it is one of the most all-encompassing prayers anyone can ever pray. It is very easy to memorize – only two clauses. It is easy enough to work into anyone's busy schedule, and takes less than 5 seconds to say. Ready?

"I am Yours, save me." (Psalm 119:94)

"I am Yours, save me."

I could, of course, commend other prayers to you. Like the Lord's Prayer:

"Our Father in heaven – You Who sit on the Throne of the universe.
Hallow Your name on earth as it is heaven.
Bring Your Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.
Cause Your good pleasure to be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And cancel our debts as we cancel the debts of others.
And when You lead us to the test, do not let the test become a temptation,
but rescue us from the evil-one."

I could commend to you the other Lord's Prayer, Jesus' prayer in John 17, where He opens up His heart to His Father, and reveals the deepest desires of His heart:

"Father, glorify Your Son that the Son may glorify You.
Keep My disciples in Your name.
Keep them from the evil one.
Make My Joy full in them.
Make them one as we are one, I in them, and they in Us.
Let them be with Me where I am.
Help them know that the love You have for Me You have for them.
Father, I want to be in them."

And I could commend the apostle Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:

"I ask the Father to strengthen you with power through the Holy Spirit in the inner person, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God."

I enthusiastically commend such prayers to you! I would be foolish not to!

But this morning I want to especially commend to you the short prayer of Psalm 119:94: "I am Yours, save me."

During the months of this past Fall, from early September up until the Saturday before Christmas, many of you have joined me in praying through the Psalms. On September 9 we began with Psalm 1 – "Blessed are those who ..." And on December 21 we concluded with Psalms 148-150 – "Hallelujah," "Hallelujah," "Hallelujah" – six times! "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!"

Along the way, we have discovered why for centuries the people of God have been drawn to the Psalms. Again and again, these ancient prayers give us the words we need to say in any and all the circumstances of our lives. We have come to agree with St. Athanasius, the great African theologian of the fourth century: "Most of Scripture speaks to us, the Psalms speak for us." Most of Scripture speaks *to us about* the Living God, the Psalms speak *for us to* the Living God. Throughout the Fall, we on the church staff have almost daily said to one another something like, "Wow, today's Psalm nailed it, did it not?" Or, "I really needed to pray that today!" Many of you have shared similar responses with me.

Because the discipline has been so meaningful to so many of us, I invite you to do it again, to enter into one more season of praying by the Book. Thus you have in your hands a new prayer calendar, beginning tomorrow with Psalm 1 – "Blessed are those who ..." and concluding on the Saturday before Easter with Psalms 148-150 – "Hallelujah!"

I have a number of favorite Psalms, where I often camp out for days. Like Psalm 2 – "As for Me, I have installed My King on Zion, My holy mountain." Referring to the Lord Jesus. And Psalm 16 – "You will make me know the path of life; in Your presence in fullness of joy; in Your right hand are pleasures forever." And Psalm 139 – "Where can I go from Your Spirit? Where can I flee from Your Presence?" But my favourite "favourite" is Psalm 119.

It is the longest Psalm in the Prayer Book, probably one of the longest prayers anywhere. 176 verses! It takes about 25 minutes to read it out-loud. It is one of the most carefully crafted of all the Psalms. There are 22 stanzas, one for each of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The Psalmist lets the alphabet guide his praying. He simply starts in with the first letter, *aleph*, and prays what the letter triggers in his soul. He then moves to the second letter, *beth*, and prays what it triggers in his soul. And on through all 22 letters. It is a powerful way to pray. Start with "a" and let it pull out of you what your heart wants to say to God. Then move on to "b" and let it pull out of you what your heart wants to say to God. And on through the whole alphabet.

Twenty-two stanzas, each with eight lines, each line beginning with the same letter. An exquisitely crafted Psalm celebrating the gift of God's Law. Law? Celebrating Law? Why? Because in the Law, through the Law, the Living God is opening up reality for us. God is telling us who we are. And God is telling us who He is.

The word translated Law is the Hebrew word "Torah." The noun comes from the verb which means to shoot, to throw. As an archer shoots an arrow, as an Olympic athlete throws a javelin. The verb also means to teach, to reveal. As one OT scholar puts it: "When one teaches another, he shoots ideas from his own mind into the other's mind. But in so doing he 'reveals' what in on his own." [George F. Knight]

Torah is God's shooting of His own thoughts to us, God's throwing what is on His mind and heart to us. So, of course Israel celebrates! The Living God has chosen to open Himself up to us!

In the 176 verses of Psalm 119 the psalmist then responds to God's Torah. That is, in the 176 verses he opens himself up to God's opening up. And through the 176 verses he helps us open up our hearts and minds to God's opening up of His heart and mind.

The Psalm is so carefully crafted that there are no repetitions. On a surface reading, it appears that the psalmist repeats a lot. But not so. Each new line comes at it from a new angle, a new perspective. After we complete this next round of praying the Psalms, I am thinking about praying Psalm 119 for 176 days, one verse at a time.

And there is one line I will want to pray everyday. Verse 94. The shortest prayer of the longest Psalm. "I am Yours, save me." Will you say the words with me? "I am Yours, save me." Again please? "I am Yours, save me."

I belong to You, O God. Save me. Because I cannot. I cannot save me. Only You can save me. Only You can save anyone. Only You can save the world. No religion can. No organization can. No government can do it. No self-help program can do it. Only You can. "I am Yours, save me."

Now, I do not know what exactly the author of Psalm 119 was thinking or feeling as he prayed this short prayer. It is safe to assume that he had in mind everything else he prays in the other 175 verses. That is, his verb "save" would encompass the other requests he makes for God's saving help: forgive, cleanse, revive, lead... And I think, it safe to assume that his "save me" also encompasses the requests for God's saving help in all the other Psalms in the Prayer Book.

We disciples of Jesus, of course, cannot help but pray the short prayer in light of the Gospel. We cannot help but pray the prayer in light of Christmas, when the Torah of God became flesh in Jesus. We cannot help but pray any prayer in light of Jesus' life and teaching, in light of Jesus' death and resurrection, in light of Jesus' ascension and coming again.

So I think we can rightly expand the short prayer into a slightly longer, but still easy to memorize prayer. In light of the Gospel "I am Yours, save me," comes out: "I am Yours in every way a human being can be Yours; save me in every way a human being needs to be saved." In that last phrase I am quoting from the end of the movie The Titanic. Remember? Rose, who survives the tragedy, is speaking about Jack, her lover, who sacrificed his life so she could go on living. Rose says of Jack: "He saved me in every way a human being needs to be saved." Slightly audacious. But not of the God Who comes to us in and as Jesus. He can and does save us in every way we humans need to be saved.

"I am Yours in every way a human being can be Yours; save me in every way a human being needs to be saved." What a prayer!

I want to now illustrate how all-encompassing this short prayer turns out to be. For the next ten to twelve minutes I will pray in your hearing what the five-second prayer awakens in my heart and mind. As you hear me pray, I am hoping your soul will say, "Yes, Lord ... me too."

Living God, I am Yours.

I am Yours by creation. You made me. I did not make myself. You – the Living, Triune God – made me. I am not a chemical-biological accident. I am not the product of some random evolutionary process. You made me. You! You willed me into existence. You formed me in my mother’s womb. And You did so for Yourself. You made me for Yourself! You made me for Your own pleasure. I am Yours by creation.

I am Yours by election. I do not know how it works. But You chose me, in Jesus Christ, before the foundation of the world. You chose me before I did anything to earn Your choosing. You chose me before I did anything to un-earn Your choosing. There is nothing I can do to reverse Your choosing. I am Yours because You choose to make me Yours!

I am Yours by redemption. You have acted to redeem me, to purchase me. When, like all other human beings, I was caught in sin, You came and bought me with a price, with the blood of Jesus. You paid the ransom for me. You bought me for Yourself! I am Your possession; like all those whom You buy, Your highly prized possession. No one can take me from You. You have redeemed me.

I am Yours by justification. You have already dealt with my case in Your courtroom. You have ruled that I am acquitted of all my rebellion. You have declared me “righteous,” “justified,” because of what Jesus has done for me. You have declared that as far as You are concerned I have kept all the requirements of Your holy law. I have not! But You have declared it so. Oh mercy, mercy, mercy.

I am Yours by reconciliation. You overcame Your holy hostility toward my sin, and made me Your friend. You have turned me, Your enemy, into Your friend. Amazing love!

I am Yours by adoption. You go beyond redemption and justification and reconciliation, and adopt me into Your family. When I was lost and kept wandering from You, You went searching for me and brought me into Your home. You could have left me on the street. But no, You adopted me! And now, like every other adopted son or daughter, You treat me like Jesus the only-begotten Son of the Father. You now bestow on me the same status and dignity the only-begotten has had from all eternity! You did not have to do it. You did not have to take me into Your Family, into You as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But You did! I am Yours by adoption.

I am Yours by engagement. You have come from the Father’s house, and You have proposed to me. You have made me, along with all those You choose, the Bride of Christ. Oh how I am Yours!

I am Yours by conquest. When I was running the other way, You ran after me. Indeed, You outran me and overtook me. You apprehended me. You seized me. You conquered me.

I am Yours by occupation. You have come to occupy me. You have come and taken up residence in me. “Christ in me, the hope of glory.” “Do you not know that you are a temple of Holy Spirit?” You are now dwelling in me, in every part of me, mind, heart, body, soul.

I am Yours by volition. I will to be Yours! I want to be Yours!

I am Yours by self-surrender. I surrender to Your relentless pursuit of me. I choose to give into Your relentless love. I choose Your choosing of me!

Living God: I am Yours in every way a human being can be Yours!

So... "Save me!" In everyway a human being needs to be saved!

Save me from myself. I am my own worst enemy. keep trying to be my own master. Please, do not let me. Trying to be my own master messes up everything. Save me from the self-turned-in-on-itself.

Save me from the grip of sin, from so often missing the mark, from regularly trespassing clearly marked boundaries. From that twistedness in the soul that makes us miss the mark and step over the lines.

Save me from the state of sin. You have rescued us, I know. But we still live with sin all around us. Please, do not let me fall back into it anyway. Do not let me wander from You. Do not let me subtly justify the slightest expression of sin.

Save me from the consequences of sin. From guilt, from shame, from alienation from You and others. From addiction to things not of You, from death. Save me from sin's curse of death! You have, and are, and will. My heart knows that. But help me live in the full realization of it. "No condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Save me into the full realization of grace.

And, oh dear God, save me from that deeply rooted sense that I still can and must save myself. I keep thinking I need to add something to the work of the cross. I keep thinking there is more to do in order to enjoy friendship with You. Please, save me from sin's great lie.

Save me from the evil-one. The father of lies. Who lies to my soul. Who keeps telling me I have to add to the work of the cross. Who keeps trying to mess with my mind. Who lies to me about You, creating suspicion in my soul; suspicion that You are not really for me, that You are not as good as You say You are. Why, O God? Why do I keep giving the voice of Your enemy more space in my head than Your voice? Why do I even give the enemy's voice any attention at all? He is so subtle, so manipulative. Save me from him!

Save me from doubting You. You are good, so very good. You have proved that over and over and over again. Yet, so much goes on around me, around us, in the world, that questions Your involvement and sovereignty.

Save me from discouragement. Save me from resentment. Save me from bitterness. Save me from self-pity.

Save me from fear. Do not let me act out of fear.

Save me from the gods and goddesses of consumerism. Everyday I am bombarded by the lie that I need all this stuff to make me happy. I do need some of it. But not anywhere near what is shouted at us everyday. Do not let me be seduced by it all.

Save me from vanity. The vanity in my own soul. The vanity that swirls all around us. Save me from empty pursuit of what is ultimately empty.

And from futility. Save me from futile quests, like the quest for power and fame. Do not let me waste time and energy on what does not really matter.

Save me from my shadow-side. DO not let any hidden sin have any sway over me.

Save me from acting out of deep wounded-ness. Do not let me in any way be driven by those wounds around my identity. Do not let me in any way be driven by hurt inflicted by others. Heal the wounds, dear Saviour!

Save me from the inappropriate ways of coping with pain that are so engrained in my soul. They never work. They only lead to more guilt and shame. Free me from habits shaped by the darkness. Save me into the light of Your holy life.

Save me from the need to control and be in control. It is all so subtle. I am not wise enough to quickly spot when it is happening. Please, do not let me fall into needing the world to go my way. Free me to keep relinquishing control to You.

Save my mind. Help me think as You think.

Save my heart. Help me feel as You feel.

Save my will. Help me will as You will. Free me to will Your will and Yours alone.

O God, save me from trying to find my soul's satisfaction in anything but You. I have lived long enough now to know that only You can satisfy the deepest longings of my heart.

Save me for Yourself. Breathe Your Breath into me again ... and again ... and again. Fill me with Your Spirit again ... and again ... and again. Save me for Your glory. Use me to joyfully declare the unfathomable riches of Christ!

O God, Help me finish well and bring me safely into our heavenly home. Save me for the reason You bothered to make me!

"I am Yours ... in everyway a human being can be Yours. So save me ... in everyway a human being needs to be saved." Save the world in everyway the world needs to be saved!

As I have been praying this short prayer over the past while, the first lines of the Heidelberg Catechism keep looming in my soul:

Question one: What is your only comfort in life and in death?

Answer one: My only comfort in life and in death is that I am not my own, but I belong – body and soul, in life and in death – to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ, who at the price of His own precious blood has fully paid for all my sins, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil.

He so watches over me that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven; in fact, all things must work together for my salvation. Because I belong to Him, Christ, by His Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life, and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for Him."

“I am Yours; save me.”

And when I then say the “Amen,” I hear Him say: “Amen ... yes ... you ARE Mine. And ... I AM yours.” It is the foundational affirmation of all the Covenants God has ever made with humanity, especially the new covenant: “I will be your God and you will be My people.”

So come to the Table, where He Who was born in a stable, says with great joy: “You are Mine, and I am yours! And because You are Mine and I am Yours, I have saved you, and I will save you, and I am saving you even now.”