



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church  
[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

April 22, 2007  
3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter  
Psalm 67  
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Acts 9:1-19a  
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 67  
Second Lesson: Revelation 5:11-14  
Gospel: John 21:1-14

### Pray Dangerously

You are in a rush and you have to stop at the grocery store to get something. You hop in the express line with whatever it was you were told to pick up and you keep looking at your watch and you keep looking at the line. You keep looking at your watch and you keep looking at the line, and then you notice the person that is there at the front of the line has more than the 10 items or 15 items or whatever it is that the sign says they are supposed to have. How do you react? Do you become indignant at this great offense to the grocery store rules? How dare they offend this grocery store this way? Or do you become indignant because they are wasting my time? Can't they read the sign? Don't they know this is screwing up my day? How dare they not obey the rules so **I** am inconvenienced!

Why do you bother to count how many items people have in their cart when you are in that line? Isn't it basically because at the very root and core of our souls, of our sinful nature, we are incredibly selfish people? Scientists may have convinced us that the earth revolves around the sun, not the sun around the earth, but our sinful nature has not yet been convinced that the universe doesn't revolve around us.

Selfishness shows its ugly head in so many different ways in our lives, not just in every day life like that, but even in our spiritual life. Have you ever noticed how selfishness can crawl into our walk with God? Does selfishness ever show itself in your prayer life? Do you spend a lot of time in your prayer life talking to God and telling him how things should be done so that your life is better? Did you ever cross over that line from praying that God's will be done to "God, could you just tweak your will a little bit so that it is closer to my will"? I think we all do that at times, whether it is praying for a specific blessing or a specific answer to a prayer, whatever the case may be, at times we are very tempted to become selfish in our life of prayer.

That is why this morning, as we look at the words of Psalm 67, the prayer starts out in such a way that our selfish nature perks up its ears. *May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us* (Psalm 67:1)—that sounds pretty good to us, right? "God bless me. God make your grace shine on me. God, do all this to bless me." But it is after we get past that initial sinful-nature-pleasing selfish part of the prayer, and we consider how in Psalm 67 we are asking God to bless us and be gracious to us, when all of a sudden we realize that we are praying dangerously here. This is a pretty dangerous prayer to me, to my sinful nature, because look at what we are praying for. After we say "May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us," it doesn't continue with "and here is my wish list, God. I want this

taken care of in my life. I want this taken care of in my health. I want this taken care of in my work life. And I want this taken care of in my relationships.” No, it’s *May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us, that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations* (Psalm 67:1, 2).

In this Psalm, when God teaches us to pray for blessings, he is trying to teach us to pray that his gospel would come to more and more people so more and more people would know the true meaning of Easter—that Jesus lived perfectly in our place, he suffered because of our sins, and he rose to life to assure us that our sins have been paid for completely and absolutely perfectly forever and ever. That is what he is telling us to pray for.

But one of the great truths is as we start praying about *May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you. May the nations be glad and sing for joy* (Psalm 67:3, 4), and when we say *Then the land will yield its harvest, and God, our God, will bless us. God will bless us, and all the ends of the earth will fear him* (Psalm 67:6, 7)—this dangerous prayer gets a little more interesting because all of a sudden we have to realize that we are a part of the answer to this prayer that we are asking from God. We might not always recognize that, and it’s not unusual that the person offering up the prayer is a part of the answer to that prayer.

Up above our altar, there is a window of Jesus praying in the Garden asking God to take that cup away, but he prayed “Not my will, but your will be done.” Then as he started to drink that cup, think of the prayer he offered when they put him on the cross. “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.” Think of how Jesus was answering that prayer right at that very time. “Father, forgive them. They don’t know what they are doing. On the basis of my perfect life and now on the basis of what I’m about to do here on the cross”—that prayer would be answered. Their forgiveness would be won. Their forgiveness would be assured. Their forgiveness would be certain, whether they believed in Jesus or not and the benefit became theirs or not, that remained to be seen. But the forgiveness, the objective nature of that forgiveness, was a certainty because of what Jesus was doing there on the cross.

That objective nature, that it is an accomplished fact, is also a part of the answer to our prayer, “May God be gracious to us and bless us, may your ways be known on earth.” As we go through life, we probably at various times in our lives pray fervently, pray earnestly, pray with what for us would approach sweat like drops of blood coming off of our forehead. “God, there is a person here that I love dearly and they don’t know you, or they have drifted away from you. And Lord, I’m not certain they are going to be in heaven with me. Lord, do something! Bring the gospel to them! Send your spirit to open their hearts so that they can believe and rejoice with me that Christ has risen. He has risen indeed!”

Have you ever prayed something along those lines in your life? Do you have a loved one that you desperately love in this world but you are not certain they are going to be with you in the next world? Well, just like Christ on the cross, you have a role and the

answer to that prayer. That is why we call it praying dangerously. We talk about that at our Friendship Witnessing Workshops.

Do you know what it means to pray dangerously? Think about it for a minute. We are not talking about praying with your eyes closed as you drive to work in the morning. That is not the kind of dangerous prayer we are talking about. It's the kind of prayer that doesn't just say, "God, you do something." It's the kind of prayer that says, "God, use me to do something. God, open my eyes so that I see the opportunities to bring the message of Jesus' law and Jesus' gospel to this person. Open my eyes so I see the opportunities and then, Lord, open my mouth. It opens so often and so frequently at times it shouldn't. When you want me to open it Lord, give me the strength of faith so that I open my mouth and I talk about your love and your forgiveness." This is praying dangerously because now there is that knot that starts in our stomach. Now we are not just saying, "Lord, you do everything." We are saying, "Lord, you use me. Let me be the instrument that brings the gospel to this person. Give me the opportunities and then help me to seize them."

It's also a dangerous prayer because when we pray this, there is a part of us that looks at our life and says, "Lord, forgive me for all the times that I have failed to do this—all the times that you opened a door for me to talk about your love and your forgiveness and I wouldn't step through it. I stayed on the porch. I wouldn't be there. I wouldn't talk. I would change the subject. Forgive me for the times, Lord, when you opened that door and I slammed it shut because of my weakness, because of my fear, because of my lack of trust in your promises."

It's also dangerous because we know how often we have failed to do this—each and every one of us. We don't always find ourselves ready to give an answer for the hope that we have. We often remain silent when we should speak, just like so often we open our mouth and speak when we should really just shut up. But that is you and me—sinful human beings.

The devil will tell us "Why even bother to pray to God that God would use you? Look at how often you failed him. He isn't going to use you! He needs some super Christian, like Paul—that guy that was on the road to Damascus to do what?—arrest Christians?"

God works through every Christian, doesn't he? There is nothing in us that makes us more equipped or better able to serve. It's God who works in us to will and act according to his good will, and the more time that you and I spend with God in the Word and Sacrament, the more time that we find forgiveness for the times that we failed him, the more time that we find ourselves walking intimately close to our Lord and Savior, the more we will be equipped to be the answer to the prayer that we pray. "Lord, let everyone know your love. Lord, let everyone be in heaven with me. Lord, let these people that I know and that I don't know, let them know your gospel." The more that we spend time with Christ, the more we are going to want to share the gospel—not just with those we love. But as we grow in faith, it goes beyond just the people that are dear to us to the people that are dear to God. The people that are dear to God is every last person you ever will see and every last person that you will never see. That is why we give of our offerings to share the gospel with people we will never see until we get to

heaven, because God loved them first and died for them while they were still sinners, like he died for us when we were still sinners. Because God loves them, now we love them. We give what our sinful nature says, "Hey, wait a minute! That's mine! Don't give that away to someone else. That's less for me." But we gladly give our offerings because then we know we are saying to the Lord, "Thank you. I love you, and I want others to know and love you."

That is what it ends up becoming all about. That becomes a part of how we also are an answer to this prayer that we ask of God, "May all the peoples praise you." You and I have a role to play. Our selfish nature isn't going to like that role very much, but the only way we ever beat the selfish nature into submission is to get closer to God through Word and Sacrament.

As we do that, God will use people like you and me, who have failed him in the past. He will lift us up out of the murk of our sinfulness and say, "You're holy in my eyes. Jesus took away your sins." As we rejoice in that forgiveness, we will want to make his gospel known. We will want to walk close with him. We will want the peoples to praise him. Then we will get busy serving him so that it happens!