

Rev. Lisa Schrott

July 14, 2024

Matthew 5: Psalm 147:1-11

*Captivated by Beauty: Falling in Love with the World*

We are in our third week of our Captivated by Beauty worship series, each week including a contemplative practice. We have experienced Visio Divina and Audio Divina and this week we explore the tradition of Praying the Hours or Daily Prayer, as it often referred to in Presbyterian and Reformed circles. I'll share more about the tradition following our scripture. To start, though, it is important to note there are three basic ingredients in each cycle of prayer: a psalm, readings from scripture, and prayer. So we will begin our Praying the Hour reflection with a reading from Psalm 147. Hear now these words of praise:

Praise the Lord!

Because it is good to sing praise to our God!

Because it is a pleasure to make beautiful praise!

The Lord rebuilds Jerusalem, gathering up Israel's exiles.

God heals the brokenhearted

and bandages their wounds.

God counts the stars by number,

giving each one a name.

Our Lord is great and so strong!

God's knowledge can't be grasped!

The Lord helps the poor,

but throws the wicked down on the dirt!

Sing to the Lord with thanks;

sing praises to our God with a lyre!

God covers the skies with clouds;

God makes rain for the earth;

God makes the mountains sprout green grass.

God gives food to the animals—

even to the baby ravens when they cry out.

God doesn't prize the strength of a horse;

God doesn't treasure the legs of a runner.

No. The Lord treasures the people

who honor him, the people who wait for his faithful love.

**This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.**

"We worship a God of unprecedented times: a God who rebuilds what has been destroyed, who gathers what has been scattered, who knows us better than we know ourselves or our situation. There are times in our lives, moments in history, when things get unimaginably hard and we don't know what to do. And still, "divine beauty shimmers and shimmies through the universe. Out of great struggles also come stories and

images of great resiliency and hope. The psalm is a good example.”<sup>1</sup> So opens the commentary by Professor Allie Utley about our psalm this morning. The psalm speaks to the beauty of the earth: the stars in the sky, clouds in sky bringing refreshing rain, the mountains sprouting green grass, the animals fed by the bounty of the earth. And the psalm also speaks to beauty of the people for whom God’s abundant love is spread: The Lord rebuilds Jerusalem, gathering up Israel’s exiles. God heals the brokenhearted and bandages their wounds. God doesn’t prize the strength of a horse; God doesn’t treasure the legs of a runner. No. The Lord treasures the people who honor him, the people who wait for his faithful love.

The psalmist praises God, imploring us to praise God, for both the beauty of the earth and because God is the God of every nation as we sang in our first hymn, and Christ shall rule victorious over all the world’s domain. The passion of the psalmists words are echoed by the words of NASA Administrator Charles Bolden, who in 2014 shared these inspiring words: “After having the privilege of flying shuttle missions and seeing Earth from the vantage point of space, I’ll never forget observing our fragile planet from above with no visible political borders, only those established by the oceans and mountains and other geography. It’s a reminder that our planet belongs to everyone ...”<sup>2</sup>

Our planet belongs to everyone. And because it belongs to everyone, we will pray this morning for the peoples of the world, using a contemplative practice known as Praying the Hours. This practice, while often associated with the Roman Catholic Church where it also known as the Divine Office, has a long history – actually dating back to the Old Testament era, when specific prayers were lifted in the morning, during the day, and in the evening.

It was in the early days of the growing Christian church that this prayer practice was more formalized, particularly in monastic communities. The website for the Augustinian community, a monastic order that follows the Rule of Saint Augustine shares that “In the third century, as monasticism found its rich beginnings in the desert, Christians desired to give unbroken, uninterrupted praise to God, following what we know today as the Liturgy of the Hours.”<sup>3</sup> Although the practice was initiated in communities of priests and monks, the Roman Catholic church adopted the practice and encourages all members to incorporate this rhythm of prayer in their life.

Each of the prayers throughout the day are designed to draw us closer God in specific ways. For example morning prayer harkens back the women finding the tomb empty as day was dawning on Easter morning and the prayers celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. Daytime prayers occur in the course of people’s work life and often incorporate Gospel passages that

---

<sup>1</sup> Allie Utley. In Sermon Fodder for Beguiled by Beauty. Fom *Beguiled by Beauty* by Dr. Marcia McFee <https://worshipdesignstudio.com/beauty>.

<sup>2</sup> Quote on Earth Observatory website from NASA: <https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/images/84214/blue-marble-eastern-hemisphere>

<sup>3</sup> Brother Sam Joutras, O.S.A. Why We Pray the Liturgy of the Hours. From: *Augustinian Men of Heart* <https://www.beafriar.org/post/why-we-pray-the-liturgy-of-the-hours#>

reflect our lived experiences. The Roman Catholic Conference of Bishops explains that "When evening approaches and the day is already far spent, evening prayer is celebrated in order that 'we may give thanks for what has been given us, or what we have done well, during the day.'"<sup>4</sup>

Lest you think that Praying the Hours is only practiced within the Roman Catholic tradition, the Presbyterian Church has adopted the practice and refers to it as Daily Prayer. *The Book of Common Worship*, which is our guide for worship and liturgy, includes a section on Daily Prayer, with specific scriptures and prayers for morning, midday, and evening prayer. There is small companion book with the prayer cycles and there is a wonderful app for your phone with the prayer liturgy and scripture (it does cost \$2.99).<sup>5</sup> During the early days of the COVID pandemic, I joined a group of pastors and church musicians who were using the Daily Prayer format to sustain our faith as we were dealing with so many unknowns. I am still part of this group – we meet every Friday morning at 8:30 am, rotating the leadership amongst the participants.

One of the features of the Daily Prayer I love is that each cycle includes prayers for the churches around the world – the church in Africa, the churches in South America, the church in Asia. It is in that spirit, that we will prayer for our world this morning, each prayer reflecting the approximate time of the day in each region. Often when we lift up prayers for our siblings around the world, we pray for those affected by natural disasters and war. This morning we will incorporate those in our Prayers for the People. For this space and moment, we will lift up prayers for ministries supporting the people in various regions around the world. Too often we neglect the day to day work of the church as our attention is drawn to the emergency situations. I will share a couple of examples from each region and leave some space for silence as we lift up prayers for everyone. Join me in prayer:

### **Morning Prayer: West Coast of the US & Canada**

Let us pray for Caridad Gardens in Las Vegas, NV. Caridad Gardens restore houseless veterans and neighbors back into community. Shawn Duncan, a recipient of the services, shares that it is the little things — like getting a birthday card — that mean a lot. Caridad Gardens is dedicated to helping and “humanizing the homeless” — through job skills training and mental, emotional and physical wellness programs.

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/yearbook/May-9-2024/>

Let us pray for the ministry of reconciliation and reparations from the PC(USA) to the members of Memorial Presbyterian Church in Juneau, Alaska. In 1963 the national denomination closed the church which served the Native Alaskan population. The building was sold and profits given to build a new church building for a White congregation. Native Alaskan descendants of the church brought the painful chapter to the attention of the current national leaders and a

---

<sup>4</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. *The Liturgy of the Hours* <https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/liturgy-of-the-hours>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/story/the-pcusas-daily-prayer-app-gets-a-big-update/>

process of restoration, healing and reparations has begun.

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/story/pcusa-delegation-rights-a-historic-wrong-in-juneau-alaska/>

Let us pray for the ministries seeking justice for missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in the Pacific Northwest and Canada. Indigenous communities have been struck by the epidemic for missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls for decades. On average, four out of five Indigenous women will experience violence in their lifetime. Within the past several years, ministries have brought awareness of this violence to the public's attention. Still, there is much work to be done. Indigenous communities find healing when the tragic situations of their loved ones are recognized on a national level. It is crucial for the survivors' stories and voices to be heard so they can mourn with peace of mind, knowing justice will be served.

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/yearbook/May-5-2024/>

(silence)

### **Midmorning Prayer: Eastern & Central United States**

We begin our prayers for the region we call home with a land acknowledgment, recognizing our need to pray for right relationships with the native peoples on whose land we reside. We collectively acknowledge that PCO occupies the ancestral, traditional, and contemporary Lands of the Anishinaabeg – Three Fires Confederacy of Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi peoples. In particular, the University resides on Land ceded in the 1819 Treaty of Saginaw. We recognize, support, and advocate for the sovereignty of Michigan's twelve federally-recognized Indian nations, for historic Indigenous communities in Michigan, for Indigenous individuals and communities who live here now, and for those who were forcibly removed from their Homelands.

We pray for churches who are using facilities that no longer fit their ministry in service of their communities. We lift up the congregation of the former Clinton Presbyterian Church in Louisiana, which now serves its community as a public library. Clinton, Louisiana is a town of 1,275 people about 45 minutes northeast of Baton Rouge. The Clinton church was founded in 1855, but had been losing members for years. With four members remaining in 2020, the congregation made the difficult decision to close its doors. The church building was given to the city, which then made it into a space for the town library.

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/yearbook/June-8-2024/>

We pray for siblings in Christ just down the road in Flint. April 25 marked the 10-year anniversary of switching the water in Flint. We pray for the work of the Community Ministries and Outreach at First Presbyterian Church of Flint which has been ministering in and through the environmental trauma that hit the Flint community. We continue to pray for justice to be served, and for restoration and revival for the people.

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/yearbook/July-6-2024/>

(silence)

### **Midday Prayer: Caribbean, Central & South America**

We pray for the Inter-Church Dialogue for Peace — DiPaz in Columbia. This is a group of Christians who have been organizing for about 10 years, working to overcome violence and achieve peace through dialogue based on an understanding of the gospel that calls us to commit to nonviolence and antimilitarism, and the search for truth and justice that make reconciliation possible. DiPaz also works to encourage the international ecumenical movement and churches in other countries to accompany the search for peace agreements with armed groups and the reintegration of former guerrillas into civil society.

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/yearbook/July-10-2024/>

We pray for the Haiti Nursing Foundation, one of our PCO Mission Partners, who improves health in the Republic of Haiti by supporting quality nursing education, primarily at the Faculté des Sciences Infirmières de l'Université Episcopale d'Haïti (FSIL), located in Léogâne, Haiti. HNF's vision is to support centers of excellence for undergraduate, graduate, and continuing education for nurses, preparing them to serve as practitioners, faculty, and leaders in Haiti's healthcare system. Even with the on-going and significant challenges in Haiti due to political unrest, the Haiti Nursing Foundation continues to train health care workers making an impact in the lives of Haitians. <https://www.haitinursing.org/about>

(silence)

### **Mid-afternoon Prayer: Europe**

We lift up prayers for ministries in Poland supporting justice, especially for marginalized communities. Organizations like Faith and Rainbow Foundation and Mission Crossroads are working to address hate crimes and hate speech against minority populations. They are seeking to provide better reproductive health options for women in Poland. They are seeking justice for people with disabilities, who are either left alone in their daily struggles or treated as a political asset, with little consideration for their dignity. They are also working with immigrants and refugees from places of war and poverty, seeking asylum in accordance with international laws. <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/yearbook/July-18-2024/>

We pray for the PC(USA) engagement in Russia. It began in the 1990s with mission outreach from the national church, mission support groups, congregations, and individuals. The ministry is lived out through congregational partnerships, education, outreach to marginalized peoples (the Roma, victims of trafficking, special needs children and adults, and orphans), ministries of compassion, peacemaking and reconciliation.

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/global/russia/>

We pray for the strong and vibrant Young Adult Ministry supported by the PC(USA) in Northern Ireland. This ministry supports efforts for reconciliation, renewal and service in Ireland through

partner churches and organizations and through our mission personnel. Northern Ireland is perhaps best known for its tragic history of violence and inter-community conflict. These “Troubles,” as they are commonly known, have left behind serious economic, emotional and spiritual needs. Violence has reduced significantly in recent years, but deep sectarian division remains a feature of Northern Irish society. Rapid economic development over recent years in the Republic of Ireland has brought new challenges and opportunities for the churches there. Once an overwhelmingly Christian and strongly Roman Catholic nation, the Republic is rapidly becoming much more secular. Increases in immigration and migrant workers are also leading to a much more multiracial and multi-faith population. In all parts of the island, society and the churches have to wrestle with various living-with-difference issues.

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/global/northern-ireland/>

(silence)

### **Evening Prayer: Middle East & Africa**

We pray for ministries seeking to provide food to the people of Gaza. For the past decade, Presbyterian Hunger Program has partnered with the Improvement and Development for Communities Center (IDCO) to revive agricultural production and rebuild greenhouses in Gaza. Over the past decade, IDCO and Gazan farmers have made great strides towards improving the food security of communities and families. This past September, before the Oct. 7 attacks the Presbyterian Advisory Committee approved a grant to IDCO for its proposed work to revitalize olive production in the Gaza Strip. According to IDCO’s proposal, “Olives are one of the most important pillars of the Palestinian economy, not only the single biggest crop in what remains a largely agricultural economy, but also having deep cultural significance to the Palestinian people and their ties to the land. It is estimated that olive trees account for nearly 45% of cultivated land in Palestine. Unfortunately, the olive project will be on hold due to the current war and widespread destruction in Gaza.

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/yearbook/May-8-2024/>

We pray for the ministry of Training Leaders for Community Transformation in Madagascar. The Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar (FJKM) through an initiative at the Ivato Seminary teaches students how to sow, how to transplant, how to graft and how to take care of the ground. The students can experiment and decide which trees they would like to grow at their first parish. When they go, they can choose ten plants to take with them. The initiative not only helps pastors to provide food for their families so that they can minister to otherwise underserved communities, but it also enables them to share the techniques with local people. These crops really making a big difference, since as many as 70% of the people who visit rural doctors are diagnosed as malnourished or lacking vitamins. The vegetables and fruit trees are a great way of helping the population. The new pastors are not only able to preach the gospel directly, but also to demonstrate the good news that God cares for all people.

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/wp-content/uploads/cgi-Training-Leaders-for-Community-Transformation-Madagascar.pdf>

We pray for the Simbolei Girls Academy in Iten, Kenya, one of PCO's mission partners. Former PCO members Richard and Andrea Kaitany noticed the lack of high-quality educational opportunities for young women in rural Kenya on their trips back to Richard's homeland of Kenya. They also noted how traditional boarding school system separated young women from their communities and families, and how this alienated the local community from the educational process. When local teachers urged them to consider starting a high school for girls in the area, they decided to build and develop a community-based high school that would link this marginalized community with the wider world.

In 2006, they purchased a disused sawmill on seven acres of land near Iten, in the village of Kamariny. The school began admitting students two years ago and is living out its vision to provide high-quality educational opportunities for young women in rural Kenya and connect the community through education.

<https://www.simboleiacademy.org/simbolei-story>

(silence)

### **Nighttime Prayer: Asia & Oceania Reflection**

We pray for the growing church in the global South, especially in regions of the world where Christians face hostility for their faith. Christians are minorities in Asia and the Pacific. Nonetheless, the Christian population may rise by about 33% and reach 381 million in 2050. In countries like China, the phenomenon of house churches continues to grow. With house churches, believers are authorized to worship from their home, usually in one large room that fits 20 to 50 people. They may have several gatherings during the week.

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/yearbook/June-18-2024/>

We lift up a season of prayer and reflection in the Korean Peninsula. June 25, marks 72 years since the Korean War broke out. Most U.S. Americans believe the war then ended in 1953; however, only an armistice agreement was signed at that time. This means outright fighting in the war has paused, but the state-of-war itself has continued for 72 years. Countless resources that might have been directed toward the health and welfare of the people throughout the Korean Peninsula have instead been spent on weapons of destruction and perpetuating hostility. In this context, our Christian partners in Korea, including the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea and the National Council of Churches in Korea, have been exerting every effort they could to encourage policy makers in Korea and in the U.S. to end policies that deepened hostility and instead open the doors to gradual mutual trust building and the cultivation of a peace regime to replace the forever war regime. The time period from June 25 until Aug. 15, has been designated a Season of Prayer and Reflection for Peace on the Korean Peninsula by the World Council of Churches.

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/yearbook/June-25-2024/>