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"You are with God and God is with you" The Rev. Kara Leslie
(09/15/2024, The Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost)

Hear these words from Psalm 19.
By them also is your servant enlightened,
and in keeping them there is great reward.
Who can tell how often one offends,
cleanse me from my secret faults?
Above all, keep your servant from presumptuous sins.
Let them not get dominion over me.
Then I shall be whole and sound
in innocent of a great offense.
Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart
be acceptable into your sight.
O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.
Amen.

We all have morning routines.
Some people wake up and have coffee the very first thing.
No talk, no touch, one eye open,
and they do not, you do not get in their way
until after the first, second, third sip.
You just don't mess with those people.
And then there are others who wake up grumpy.
If you have somebody in this like this in your family
or have in the past, then you know the best thing to do
is to hide.
I will also offer the opportunity to add them
to our prayer list because they are difficult people.
And others wake up ready to run.
Do hot yoga at 5.30 in the morning,
bike, or some other kind of physical activity
and exercise before they get out and face the world.
And then there are still others who do miracles every morning.
They get themselves ready.
They get their children ready.
They make lunches and breakfast, do the dishes.
And then they feed the dogs and maybe the cat
because you know everybody knows cats are self-sufficient.
And then they get their purse, their keys, the food,
everything they need for their work, their kids' school,
and then after school activities and after work activities.

They get it all together and they get it in the car
and out the door.
Now when my kids were younger and we were running late,
my son would ask me, mama, is this a two-wheeled day?
Talking about the way I took turns going up to the ramp
to get it to their school.
If there was a vitamin, a morning regimen,
a daily exercise, a process that would one revive your soul
to rejoice your heart.
Three, give sight.
Four, help us live a long life.
Five, 100% pure and true, 100% natural and clean,
100% natural and righteousness.
Would you take it?
Would you take it?
Obviously nobody would take it.
OK, all right.
Now here, thank you, thank you for whoever said that.
What if it only came in seaweed flavor?
Would you, yeah, we might have to take it, right?
And our soul, we are told the law, testimony, statues,
and commandments all in wonder, and judgments all help
to revive our souls, to give wisdom to the innocent,
to rejoice the heart, to give light to the eyes,
to endure forever, and to bring us into unity.
What a deep desire it is to long for this kind of relationship
with God, more than gold, not just gold,
but more than anything we've ever seen, that fine, pure gold.
More than honey, just plain honey out of the little honey
bear at the stores, nothing compared to taking it fresh
from the hive and tasting that warm honey
with a little bit of comb.
It's so pure.
Have you ever desired something with your whole being?
The desire for most of us is followed by an outcome.
This is what we desire.
This is the outcome.
But then there's that third thing that happens called reality.
And sometimes it has very little to do with desire, an outcome.
You have a perfect wedding.
That's your desire.
You found the right person.
You waited a long time.
And now you're planning the most special day.
Your hopeful outcome is that everyone gets along.
No one absolutely, no one overindulges in rich food or beverages.
And the dance floor is full of people having fun
in a blast, shaking their feet.
And the words you shared with that special partner
until death do us part, that is the desire.

And then there's reality.
Well, I can't sit on that row with those people.
And why did you have to invite them?
You know, they're really not family or friends.
And then there are some of those overachievers
in the food and beverage category.
And they get really sloppy, really quick.
And then after the first death in the family a few months later,
all those secrets come out.
An old habits destroy the bond and the hope.
And after years of one-sided therapy,
a divorce is the reality.
Maybe you desire to go to college or did go to college.
And you wanted that degree that you knew
that you were made for since you were at five years old.
Mama, I'm going to be a veterinarian.
Mama, I'm in a right poetry.
Daddy, I want to be an engineer.
So you go to college and after four or five years,
you walk across the stage with a six-figure piece of paper.
And of course, you're thinking, well, I'm going to make it.
At least that in my first job.
That is the desired outcome.
And then there's reality, student loans, and a second job.
Maybe you desire to be cured of cancer.
You take all the treatments, the radiation,
the chemotherapy, you spend hours of your time
seeking medical intervention.
You do everything they say to do.
And then finally, you hear those words.
You are cancer-free.
The reality, your hair's not the same.
Your taste buds are not the same.
Nothing is the same.
Your body might be cancer-free,
but the reality is in your mind
and in your story of your life,
there will always be the seaward.
Now let's talk about our relationship with God.
It starts out like the Psalm does.
Declaring God's glory one day tells another and another
and one night in parts into another night the knowledge
and the love and the majesty of God.
You hear it in the majestic ways and see it
in the beautiful sunsets that we've had this last week.
This is what you desire to have a day flowing with God.
With God.
Morning to night, night to morning,
flowing with God.
Nothing else to get in the way of your focus on Jesus

and prayer and scripture and hope,
service and new life in Christ.
The outcome can happen in two ways.
For many of you, you can feel God doesn't listen to you.
Hear your pleas and is too busy taking care of the folks
that have it easy to listen to one more time
of your sorrows, your sadness and your sin.
Or maybe the outcome of your completely godly dedication
ends up being about how the church hurt you.
Too much focus on the wrong thing, what you are not,
how you will never be, what you have to spend your time
and money doing to get it right with God.
Sudden changes in leadership that uproot everything
or just an emptiness, an emptiness that can fill
when we start to believe that our relationship with Jesus
is all our doing.
We just have to be good enough and write in the right ways
in the same breath to have reality equal our desire.
But there is another reality and the reality is
you have a desire for a relationship with God.
Life gets in the way.
It gets in the way it messes up the waters.
It messes up your choices.
It makes life so challenging at times.
But this is the reality here that you are loved by God
just as you are.
Just as you are.
Regardless of your outcome, regardless of your desire,
that fact, the reality of God's love for you
was sealed in the tomb, was taken down off the cross.
And there is nothing that any one of us can do
to change that reality.
Desire and outcome might change
but the reality of you being loved unconditionally
will never change.
Never.
The psalm has something else that we should inquire about
who can tell how often one offends.
I mean, do we wake up counting our sins?
I would hope not.
There's other things to do.
If you need something else to do,
I have many ways for you to volunteer.
Can you count that high every day?
Do you want to spend your energy chopping yourself down,
chopping other people down?
As the sin and our scripture from the psalm
appears to be two different kinds,
ones that we see with our eyes wide open,
the presumptuous sins and others that are secretive.

Sins, like the kind James spoke about,
describes us as among members of a world of iniquities,
stains to the body,
set on fire the cycles of nature
and as itself set on fire,
talking about the tongue
and what it can do to tear others down.
The folks of James were lighting each other on fire
with their tongues.
We think that's something that happened back
in the Bible time,
but if you've turned on the news recently,
it's a little bit every day.
The very things that enable us to curse and bless
also enable us to eat the heavenly banquet.
And then there's those other sins,
those ones that are so secretive that we are so ashamed
that we think God doesn't even know about them.
I mean, it's like God can only see
the Sunday version of us
and not every other day that ends with a why.
We all seem to believe that surely if God knew
who we are, what we've done,
what we have left undone,
God would be done with us.
Just done.
You would be cast out into the edges of darkness.
There is more verse 13,
let them not have dominion over me.
That's what this all says about sin,
whether they're hidden or eyes wide open sin,
let them not have power over me.
This is exactly what we ask God every time we say the prayer
that we begin our worship with,
the collect for purity.
Almighty God, to you all hearts are open,
all desires known and from you no secrets are hidden.
Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration
of your Holy Spirit that we may perfectly love you
and worthy magnify your Holy name through Christ our Lord.
And then again, we'll hear it in the creed.
And again,
and the prayers of the people.
And in the peace is the reality of God's love
in our lives and repelling us through those times
of great sin that seemed to have power over us.
The reality is God isn't holding it against us.
Why are we?
How easy is it for us to focus on the wrongs our sins
and what we are not and what we will never be?

I think one of the greatest challenges that we have in our society
is this desire to be completely independent.
I did it all by myself.
I can do it.
I don't need any help.
We think we can do it.
And our culture teaches us to be solo in a world of many.
But then here's the reality.
Without God, we are not able to please God.
So the desire to be independent of God is that a desire.
But the reality is is that we move and live and have our being
in Christ.
We start there, we end there and everything in between
is a part of God's reality and a part of our reality in God.
We have all these desires given to us to revive our souls,
to be wise, to rejoice in our heart, to be able to see not only
with our eyes, but with our soul.
To live a long and fruitful life.
To be a hundred percent true, to be a hundred percent natural,
to be a hundred percent in right relationship with God.
No matter the outcome of your life,
the reality is you are with God and God is with you.
And as the prayer that I say every time I begin a sermon
reminds us all that let the words of my mouth and the meditations
of our hearts be acceptable unto you,
our Lord, my strength and Redeemer.
The reality is that God is your strength and your Redeemer.
Amen.