**Confirmation at Zion Lutheran Church**

**Psalms**

**Background Information**

The Psalms, also known as the Psalter or the Prayer Book of the People, is a collection of 150 unique prayers, songs, and poems (most of them function as all three) each calling to mind different emotions and experiences of what it means to be human. Indeed, it is difficult to think of an emotion that is not already covered in the Psalms.

The psalms have been categorized in many ways. The table on page 849 of the LSB illustrates how they have categorized the Psalms.

Many of the Psalms are attributed to King David, but it's likely David only wrote some of those, while others were simply attributed to him because of his fame and stature in Israelite history.

Many of the Psalms were written for, or out of, a particular historical situation. For example, the Psalms of Ascent were written to accompany the community as they made their way to Jerusalem for the Passover. We can imagine families and and groups of families traveling by foot or by beast for miles and days singing these songs of ascent to pass the time as they made their way toward Jerusalem.

Many were written during periods of captivity and exile as a way of offering lament and prayers for restoration. In this way, reading the Psalms is much like listening to the soundtrack of the community’s life – they allow us to discern the emotional pulse of the community at various times.

By reading or praying the Psalms of antiquity, we get language for our own emotions and experiences as the people of God. They provide us with a template for incorporating our feelings into our faith and our relationship with God. The book of Psalms gives us words to use in our prayer lives and expands our understanding of prayer: the Psalms both model and inspire in us artistic, creative, and emotionally honest prayers. The Psalms also permit us to express anger and disappointment toward God. We see in the Psalms that God craves our attention in whatever way God can get it, and if it is through hearing our hurt and frustration, we learn that God can take it.

In addition to giving us language and models for prayer, the Psalms continue to be used as liturgy in our personal and communal worship. Reading or singing the Psalms (even when the emotions expressed are not our own) helps shape our identity as people of faith – connecting us with those who have gone before us as well as enabling us to bring the whole of who we are before God.

**About the Lutheran Study Bible (LSB)**

Please turn to page 847 and read the introduction to the Psalms. Read the articles entitled “Background File,” “What’s the Story?” and “What’s the Message.” These articles can be found at the beginning of every book of the Bible and are very helpful in getting a basic understanding of each book’s content.

**What you need to know**

**Corporately**The Psalms are the prayer book or hymnal of the Bible. The Evangelical Lutheran Worship hymnal (ELW) contains all 150 psalms, "pointed" for use in worship. They can be read responsively or chanted back and forth between the cantor and the congregation. However, the psalm selection for the day may have nothing to do with the other readings prescribed for the day. Zion has not had a tradition of using the psalms in worship.

Reciting Psalms in worship or in prayer helps form us into faithful people. It connects us with those who have gone before us as well as with those in our midst who might be experiencing the feelings expressed in the given psalm.

The monks at the Abby of Gethsemane pray all 150 psalms each week. Many of the monks have them committed to memory. By reciting each of the psalms each week they believe that they are praying for all the people of the world no matter where they are or what they are experiencing.

**Historically**While we can sometimes discern the historical setting in which a psalm was written, their function is not to tell stories but to give voice to the prayers and songs of individuals and communities.

**Individually**The book of Psalms is a resource for our own individual prayer lives. With 150 Psalms to choose from, it's almost always possible to find a psalm that expresses our current emotion or mood. Praying the Psalms is one way to give voice to feelings and emotions that might otherwise feel too big for words or prayer.

Struggling with prayer is not uncommon. The Psalms can provide a template for writing or praying prayers. Upset? Happy? Sad? There are time-tested words that can be chosen anytime.

Using the Psalms in any of the ways mentioned help to bring our whole selves before God in prayer. They cause us to be vulnerable in our joy and our pain - there’s not a lot hidden in the poems and prayers of the Psalms.

**Essay Questions**

*In 150 of your own words, briefly answer any three of the following questions below and return them to Pastor Jesse by email at* *pastor@zionohio.org* *no later than next Sunday.*

1. Read **"Prayers for help"** on page 849, then read Psalm 4. Tell me about the psalm including the heading, and the range of emotions, in order, that the psalmist goes through in this psalm. Listen to the following song as you read along: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dEbhc07wOug>
2. Read **"Communal"** on page 849, then read Psalm 60. Tell me about the psalm including the heading, and the range of emotions, in order, that the psalmist goes through in this psalm. Listen to the following song as you read along: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q4M17mAUCBw>
3. Read **"Hymns of praise"** on page 849, then read Psalm 47. Tell me about the psalm including the heading, and the range of emotions, in order, that the psalmist goes through in this psalm. Listen to the following song as you read along: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5bbixLjg2kY>
4. Read **"Creation psalms"** on page 849, then read Psalm 8. Tell me about the psalm including the heading, and the range of emotions, in order, that the psalmist goes through in this psalm. Listen to the following song as you read along: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Bfgc6XWC6I>
5. Read **"Enthronement psalms"** on page 849, then read Psalm 95. Tell me about the psalm including the heading, and the range of emotions, in order, that the psalmist goes through in this psalm. Listen to the following song as you read along: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0klon4QujvE>
6. Read **"Liturgies"** on page 849, then read Psalm 118. Tell me about the psalm including the heading, and the range of emotions, in order, that the psalmist goes through in this psalm. Listen to the following song as you read along:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GY0vX3lh8Nk>
7. Read **"Trust Psalms"** on page 850, then read Psalm 46. Tell me about the psalm including the heading, and the range of emotions, in order, that the psalmist goes through in this psalm. Listen to the following song as you read along: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PKs_gQecaDY>