

Psalm 4:1-8 O.T. 464 (NRSV)

¹Answer me when I call, O God of my right! You gave me room when I was in distress. Be gracious to me, and hear my prayer.

²How long, you people, shall my honor suffer shame? How long will you love vain words, and seek after lies? *Selah*

³But know that the LORD has set apart the faithful for himself; the LORD hears when I call to him.

⁴When you are disturbed, do not sin; ponder it on your beds, and be silent. *Selah*

⁵Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the LORD.

⁶There are many who say, “O that we might see some good! Let the light of your face shine on us, O LORD!”

⁷You have put gladness in my heart more than when their grain and wine abound.

⁸I will both lie down and sleep in peace; for you alone, O LORD, make me lie down in safety.

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“Answer Me!”

Opening Prayer: Please bow with me in prayer. O God, on this warm spring day, we come into your presence to be instructed in your ways. Open our minds and soften our hearts so that we will hear and understand what you have to say to us today. In Christ’s precious Name we pray, **Amen.**

Introduction: **Have you ever watched** someone thinking? We all do it all of the time, but there are times when it’s much more consuming than others. Sometimes thinking comes easy, **and other times thinking comes hard.** You look at someone thinking and while you can tell they are indeed thinking, you’re really not sure what they’re thinking about. So, you walk up and say, “***A penny for your thoughts.***” It’s an old saying, and it just sort of slips off the tongue out of sheer force of habit. But have you ever thought about what that saying implies? It implies that while you are curious about what the other person is thinking, knowing what they’re thinking isn’t really worth very much to you at all. After all, **what can you get** for a penny these days? Pennies have so little value that **many of us leave them behind** when the checkout clerk us gives us our change. **Even when I was a kid**, penny candies **actually cost ten cents.** **If knowing someone’s thoughts** is at all that important to you, surely, it’s worth more than a penny.

What would you be willing to pay to know God’s thoughts? Surely God’s thoughts are worth a whole lot more than a penny. Teenagers, how much would you be willing to pay **to know what God’s wants** you to do when you grow up? How much would you be willing to pay to know **who you should marry**? Adults, how much would you be willing to pay **to hear God’s advice** on how you should deal with some situation that’s troubling you. **How to deal with a wayward child.** **How to deal with a forgetful spouse.** **How to deal with** that sense that your life is spinning out of control.

Well, Bibles cost anywhere from about **\$5** up to about **\$75 dollars** and they reveal the thoughts of God. But as we all know, while **the Bible contains** one of the greatest collections of wisdom ever gathered, there are some things it doesn't tell you. **The Bible doesn't** to tell you the name of the person you're supposed to marry. **The Bible doesn't** to tell you whether you should take job A or job B. **Discerning God's will** involves more than just reading a book. Discerning God's will involves **knowing God's thoughts**. It involves putting a question to God and getting an answer. **So, like King David of old**, we ask our question, and as the silence grows louder and louder, in desperation we cry out, "**Hurry up LORD, answer me; my spirit's exhausted**" (Psalm 143:7, JWP). Yes, knowing God's thoughts is very important to us.

PAUSE

Move I.

We are impatient to hear from God. In many ways I think many of us are still toddlers. We want what we want exactly when we want it. It's almost as if life is a trip in a minivan with God in the driver's seat up front **and all of us buckled in our seats** in back every minute or so asking "*Are we there yet?*" When we ask a question, we expect an immediate answer. If there's one thing we can't stand its silence, especially when we have questions weighing heavy on our minds. **We hate it** when we find ourselves left all alone with our thoughts.

I read in Science Magazine once about some social psychology research funded by the National Science Foundation that found that most people would rather do anything, even things that are unpleasant, **than have to** sit in silence and simply think. In the study researchers isolated subjects for 15-minutes with nothing to do but to think. **They couldn't** check their cell phones. **They couldn't watch TV**. **They couldn't** look out the window. **They couldn't** even get up and walk around the room or get down and do pushups. **All they could do** was sit there and think, with one tiny little exception. They could give themselves and a painful electrical shock. Before the experiment began, researchers hooked electrodes to the subject and **gave them a button** they could press to shock themselves. The researchers convinced all of the subjects **to try it** just once so they could see what it was like. **To a person**, every one of the subjects said that the electrical shock hurt so much they wouldn't do that to themselves again. Yet, as they sat there in silence for 15 minutes, low and behold **4 out of 10** subjects **gave themselves** one or more electrical shocks. What that tells us is that they would rather experience anything, even something painful than sit there in silence with their own thoughts. The mindless, the mundane, even the painful are preferable to having to sit and think. **No wonder** there are so many people who are cutters. **Upwards to one in ten** teenagers cut themselves to escape emotional pain.

I'm curious, of those over 30 here today, how many of you know someone who cuts themselves? (Raise hand.) Ok, now of those of you 30 and younger here today, how many of you know someone who cuts themselves. (Raise hand.) I can't begin to tell you the number teenagers, particularly girls, I've spoken with **who use dozens of those rubber wristband bracelets** to hide their scares. And there are some who are far more creative who cut themselves in places no one can see. It's a tragic reality of modern life with its instant communication **that there are people**, particularly young people, who feel so alienated that they'd rather suffer physical pain than endure more emotional isolation.

No time is worse for someone who is suffering mental anguish, than when it's time to sleep. Even though they're exhausted, that can't fall asleep. Their mind races, they toss and turn. **King David** speaks of such times in our Bible Lesson today. **In Psalm 4:4 (NRSV)** David writes, "**When you are disturbed, do not sin; ponder it on your beds, and be silent.**" Many are averse to silence, and yet God speaks most clearly in silence. **God speaks** in a still small voice.

That phrase a "still small voice" comes from the prophets Elijah's encounter with God after he had fled from Queen Jezebel who had vowed to kill him. **It's there in 1 Kings 19** with Elijah hiding in a cave up in the mountains that **a great whirlwind appeared**, but that God was not in the whirlwind. Next there was **powerful earthquake**, but God was in the earthquake. And then there was a **raging fire**, but God was in the fire. And finally, after the whirlwind, and earthquake, and fire, there was silence, **and it was in the silence** that Elijah heard God's "still small voice" in the midst of the sheer silence. God speaks at the point of despair. **Yes, we are impatient to hear God.**

End I.

Move II.

But God's answers aren't always what we want to hear. We ask a question, but we already know what answer we want, so it's not obvious why we ask the question in the first place. We approach God with preconceived notions of what the outcome should be. **How do those lines** in the *Lord's Prayer* go? **"My kingdom come, my will be done, here on earth, if not in heaven."** It sounds so familiar; it has the same cadence. But of course, we've reversed the point-of-view. We're being the little toddler once again, we want what we want, and so long as God's willing to go along with that, things will be fine with us. But why do you bother to look to God if you're not going to pay any attention to the answer God provides? I guess we do it because we want to look religious even if we're not.

In the Apostle Paul's second letter to his apprentice Timothy, Paul speaks about people who want to look godly, but really aren't. What Paul has to say might seem harsh, it may even seem over the top, but Paul is never one to mince words. Let me read to you from **2 Timothy 3:2-5 (NRSV)**:

"²For people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³inhuman, implacable, slanderers, profligates, brutes, haters of good, ⁴treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵holding to the outward form of godliness but denying its power. Avoid them!"

I can already hear some of you protesting, "*Pastor Jim, I'm not like that, I'm not boastful, proud, and abusive.*" But if even one or two of the twenty maladies on Paul's list ever applies to you, you too are "***holding to the outward form of godliness but denying its power.***" We are to live and move and have our very being in Jesus. **It's not** "my kingdom come," **it's** "*Thy kingdom come.*" It's not "My will be done," **it's** "*Thy will be done.*" Yes, the prayer asks for **God's will** to happen here on earth, **just as it's already** happening there in heaven.

Have you ever found yourself in the situation that what you want and what God wants are at odds with each other? **It's been six years** since Donna and I first learned that Bishop Bickerton was sending us here to Erie. **We were serving in Union City at the time**, and we'd figured wherever we'd be sent next would be further south and a bit **closer to the rest of our family**. But the bishop was **sending us further north**, in fact about as far north in the conference as possible. In hindsight we can see why God wanted us here, but back then all we knew was what was happening wasn't what we'd been hoping for. Now that probably didn't quite rise **to the level of the Prophet Jonah**, who when God dispatched him **to Nehemiah, hightailed it to Tarshish**, which is heading in the exact opposite direction. But the simple matter is what God wanted and what we'd expected didn't. **Now it would've been easy to blame the Bishop**. That's what people always do. They accuse the Bishop of being uncaring and out of touch. But Bishops are really no different than us. They're constantly struggling to know God's will and then struggling to do it too.

It's in the Epistle of James that we find some wise counsel for those times when what God is saying isn't matching up with what we wish God was saying. **In James 1:22 (NIV)** we read, **“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.”** When God speaks, not only do we need to listen, we also then need to do what God says. We need to obey. **After all**, it didn't go very well for Jonah when he fled in the opposite direction did it? **He ended up in the belly of a great fish**. **So, we moved to Erie**, because that's what God wanted us to do, and now the rest is history. Back when I entered ministry, I asked God where I should go. **But God's answers aren't always what we want to hear.**

End II.

Move III.

Yet God's answers are always good. In our hearts we know everything God wants for us is good, but for some reason we tend to forget that. **So many** people picture God as being the strict parent who is forever criticizing His children for all of their mess-ups. Unfortunately, there are people whose earthly fathers or mothers are like that, but that's not what our heavenly father is like. **God is good** all of the time and **all of the time** God is good. One of the most reassuring verses in the Bible about God's desired for each of us is Romans 8:28 (NRSV) which says, "**And we know that in all thing God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.**" Notice that it's doesn't say some things work for good; it says all things work for good. **All means all.**

Our Bible Lesson today, Psalm 4, is one of 73 of the 150 Psalms attributed to King David. Biblical Scholars classify Psalm 4 as an **individual lament**. A lament is a complaint about tragic our trying circumstances. **When things** aren't going your way, you cry out "***O God, why is this happening to me.***" Why? Why?

King David was the warrior king. He undertook one campaign after another against Israel's neighbors to the north, and south, and east. And not only did he face threats from without the country, but he also faced threats from within. I think we have a hard time envisioning what a multifaceted man King David was. **We think of him** as the shepherd boy who tended his father Jesse's sheep. **We think of him** as the young boy who stood up to the Philistine giant Goliath with just a slingshot and a few smooth stones. **We think of him** as the man who lusted after Bathsheba when he saw her bathing from a nearby roof. **We think of him** as the musician who composed psalms to God. **But we seem** to have a hard time seeing him as a warrior king. I want to show you a bit of a trailer of a movie called "*David the Warrior King*."

{**Play Video: "Lokprent-David Warrior King-clip.mp4" [0:53]**}

The opening words on that trailer are from another one of **David's Psalms, Psalm 18**. **"The LORD is my Rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my strength, in whom I will trust. I will not fear."** David trusted God with all of his heart, and all of his mind, and all of his strength. He knew God would work all things together for good for him and his nation. **There may be occasional setbacks**. There may be days he lost the battle, but he was always sure he was going to win the war. Not because he was a mighty King, of a valiant people, **but because their God** was the Lord God Almighty, creator of the heavens and earth. **Have I helped you** see King David as God's man, the warrior king?

In Psalm 4 we don't know what tragic or trying circumstances prompted David to write his lament, but we do know that David is confident things are going to work out for good. **The Psalm never says that David** received God's answer even though he had demanded it from the start when he cried out **"Answer me when I call"** (Psalm 4:1a, NRSV). And yet, even without any indication God has answered, the Psalm ends with David writing these words, **"I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O LORD, make me lie down in safety"** (Palms 4:8, NRSV). That's great faith. That's faith that trusts even in the midst of battle. And that's faith that even trust when the battle is being lost. **That's faith that believes** God is good all of the time, and all of the time God is good. Sometimes all we receive from God is silence. **Yet God's answers, even silent answers, are always good.**

End III.

Conclusion: “*A penny for your thoughts.*” Gee whiz, surely knowing someone’s thoughts is worth more than a penny, and knowing God’s thoughts, why that has to be worth absolutely everything. So, we cry out, “*Hurry, answer me, LORD; my spirit is exhausted.*” **Yes, we are impatient to hear God.** We can’t stand to be alone with our own thoughts, but when we ask God a question, we expect an immediate answer. We want to hear God speak. We want to know God’s thoughts. **But God’s answers aren’t always what we want to hear.** We approach God with preconceived notions of what the outcome should be. What we want for ourselves and what God wants for us don’t match. **Yet God’s answers are always good.** God’s always working everything together for good for those who love him. And everything means everything. In tragic or trying circumstances we cry out to God, “**Answer Me!**” But we must have faith that all of God’s answers, **even the answer of silence**, is good.

Closing Prayer: Let’s pray. O God you come to us in the silence of our minds, in the midst of our thoughts, and you fill us with your truth. May we learn to trust you, even in the silence. **Amen!**

10:30 a.m. Closing Hymn: “I Am Thine, O Lord” Red Hymnal No. 419

All Four Verses

Sending Forth: Do you have questions that need answers? Has it been a long time since you last heard from God? Then trust God even in the silence. Go forth, and when you cry out to God, “*Answer Me!*” learn to trust even when God is silent. **Amen!**