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A Child's Prayer

*"Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth." (Psalm 46:10)*

One day a man was walking through a department store with his two-year-old son. The child was in a very grouchy mood and nothing seemed to satisfy as he fussed and fumed. The frustrated father tried everything to quiet his son, but nothing seemed to help. The child simply would not obey or listen. Then, for whatever reason, the father scooped up his son and, holding him close to his chest, began singing an impromptu love song. None of the words rhymed. He sang off key, not caring who in the store might overhear him. As best he could, this father began sharing from the depths of his heart. "I love you," he sang. "I am so glad you're my boy. You make me happy. I like the way you laugh." On they went from one aisle to the next. Quietly, the father continued singing off key and making up words that did not rhyme. The cantankerous child relaxed and became still, listening to this strange and wonderful song. Finally, they finished shopping and went to the car. As the father opened the door and prepared to buckle his son into the car seat, the child lifted his head and said, "Sing it to me again, Daddy! Sing it to me again!"

In a way, the picture of that father and son remind me of what prayer is so often in my life. When I am a little cranky and crabby or anxious and afraid, my Father gathers me up into His arms as He sings His love song to quiet me. This is what I hear Him doing in Psalm 46. The words of this Psalm describe a world that is being shaken at its core. You can hear it in some of the words: *"Therefore*

we will not fear; though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea" (v. 2). "Nations are in uproar; kingdoms fall" (v. 6). In the midst of this great uncertainty and instability, God says, "Be still, and know that I am God" (v. 10). With these words, it is as if He is scooping us up in His arms like the father with his child in the store. Prayer has many facets to it, but none more precious or beautiful than that of love. St. Augustine said, "True whole prayer is nothing but love."

Show me someone who prays well, someone whose words touch the heart of another deeply, and I will show you someone who is in love—in love with the One to whom they pray and in love with those for whom they pray so passionately.

Nowhere is this seen more vividly than in the life of Jesus. Love is the language of Jesus' prayers. Time after time, one can hear the passionate and deep love in the prayers Jesus offered. Nowhere more intimately is this evident than in the Garden of Gethsemane.

"Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. 'Abba, Father,' he said, 'everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will'" (Mark 14:35).

This is the prayer of a child crying out to his daddy. Intimate words of love that plead for another way to deal with what lies ahead. Yet, His prayer that night is not only out of love for His Father, but for His disciples as

well. This is so beautifully reflected by John as He records more of Jesus' prayer that night: "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one" (John 17:15). His disciples were not the only ones on His mind that night:

"My prayer is not for them alone; I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you" (John 17:20-21).

Can you hear Him singing that song of love over you? You and I were on His mind that night. Generations yet to be born were on His mind that night. Over all of us, Jesus was singing His song of love to quiet us in our own moments of pain and anguish. Is there any more beautiful song to hear than when God sings His song of love over us?

There are times in worship when I find myself singing a song of praise to Him, and it is as if He is at the same time singing His own song of love over me in a Holy duet. One song that comes to mind where I have experienced this time and time again is "Jesus, Lover of My Soul" (Lutheran Worship #508):

Jesus, Lover of my soul,
Let me to Thy mercy fly
While the nearer waters roll,
While the tempest still is high.
Hide me, O my Savior, hide,
Till the storm of life is past;
Safe into the haven guide.
Oh, receive my soul at last!

Other refuge have I none;
Hangs my helpless soul on Thee.
Leave, ah, leave me not alone,
Still support and comfort me!
All my trust on Thee is stayed,
All my help from Thee I bring;
Cover my defenseless head,
With the shadow of Thy wing.

Wilt Thou not regard my call,
Wilt Thou not accept my prayer?
Lo, I sink, I faint, I fall;

Lo, on Thee I cast my care;
Reach me out Thy gracious hand!
While I of Thy strength receive,
Hoping against hope, I stand,
Dying, and behold, I live!

Remember, however, that prayer is not just one way. As God sings His song of love over us, He desires that time of intimate fellowship with us as well. Look again into the Garden. He longs for fellowship with His disciples in prayer:

"Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, 'Sit here while I go over there and pray. . . . My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me'" (Matthew 26:36, 38).

In one of His loneliest moments Jesus hungered for someone to sing a song of love over Him. Jesus still invites us to pray with Him and share in this holy duet—this song of love for each other. This is what I love about the great hymns of the church. They are filled with words where God sings His song of love over me, and where I in return sing my own song of love over Him. Consider again the hymn, "Jesus, Lover of My Soul." In the first three stanzas, it is as if I were the little child saying, "Sing it again Daddy, sing it again." But then in the final two stanzas, the tone changes. Now it is I who am singing to Him. I am singing my song of love for who He is and what He has done:

Thou, O Christ, art all I want;
More than all in Thee I find.
Raise the fallen, cheer the faint,
Heal the sick, and lead the blind.
Just and holy is Thy name;
I am all unrighteousness,
False and full of sin I am;
Thou art full of truth and grace.

Plenteous grace with Thee is found,
Grace to cover all my sin.
Let the healing streams abound;
Make and keep me pure within.

Thou of life the Fountain art,
Freely let me take of Thee;
Spring Thou up within my heart,
Rise to all eternity.

Jesus invites us to join Him in a duet—a song of love for each other. But there in the Garden, let us not forget that He had someone else on His mind and heart as He prayed. Listen as He prays, “*May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me*” (John 17:21). On His mind and heart was a lost and dying world. Jesus is inviting you and me to join Him in a song of love, to

pray earnestly for those who do not believe. Who is there in your life that does not know Jesus Christ? Would you be willing to pray for three people every day at 3:00 p.m.? (Just tuck it in your mind—“3 at 3”.) As we do this, our joy and privilege will be that we are singing a duet with Christ Himself. This is the true essence of a Child’s Prayer.

Prayer: Father, Daddy, sing it again. Sing it again to me. Let your song of love in Jesus, which you first sang over me in my Baptism, be the joy of my heart this day. Sing to me of your love and grace and constant presence throughout this day. **Amen.**

Challenge: Asking God to sing His own song of love over you, take a few moments to reflect on the song “Jesus, Lover of My Soul” and its message for you today.

Scripture Reading: Psalm 46

From the Book of Concord: “And [I believe] in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our LORD, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended into hell. On the third day he rose [again]; he ascended into heaven, seated at the right hand of God, the almighty Father, from where he will come to judge the living and the dead.

“What is this? Answer: I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father in eternity, and also a true human being, born of the Virgin Mary, is my LORD. He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned human being. He has purchased and freed me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death. He has done all this in order that I may belong to him, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in eternal righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he is risen from the dead and lives and rules eternally. This is most certainly true” (The Small Catechism, The Second Article of the Creed, p. 355.3-4).