

LIVING EACH DAY IN THE SPIRIT

Message based on: HYMN OF THE DAY LW #478
"Awake My Soul and With the Sun"

Awake, my soul, and with the sun
Your daily stage of duty run;
Shake off dull sloth and joyful rise
To pay your morning sacrifice.

All praise to you, who safe have kept
And have refreshed me while I slept,
Grant, Lord, when I from death shall wake,
I may of endless light partake.

Lord, I my vows to you renew.
Disperse my sins as morning dew;
Guard my first springs of thought and will,
And with yourself my spirit fill.

Let all my converse be sincere;
my conscience as the noonday clear.
Think how the all-seeing God my ways
and all my secret thoughts surveys [the "missing verse"]

Direct, control, suggest this day
All I design or do or say
That all my powers with all their might
In your sole glory may unite.

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise him, all creatures here below;
Praise him above, O heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

MESSAGE:

Did you listen to the words of our sermon hymn today as you sang it? *[inserted above]*
It's one of my favorite hymns—in fact I sing it every morning. It sounds great in the shower!
Anyway, today I'm going to invoke an old Lutheran custom (it's the custom that's old—
not the Lutheran) and preach on this hymn, because it contains some of the best advice
you'll ever find about how to be guided by the Spirit of God each and every day of your
life.

The first lines are: *Awake my soul and with the sun, Your daily stage of duty run; Shake off dull sloth and joyful rise, to pay your morning sacrifice.* Now as good Lutherans we know that we are saved because God chose us and not because we chose Him, but we can choose to begin each day of our lives by inviting God into our day. “Rouse me to action, Lord!” “Work miracles through me today!” “Help me to work out my *salvation with fear and trembling!*” “*Help me to will and to act according to Your good purpose!*”

So if you’ve ever wondered what there is that you can do to activate God in your life, let the first thing you do every single morning—even before your feet hit the floor—be to invite God into your day. Offer your body, your mind and your spirit up to his control as your morning sacrifice and you will be in good hands! As Paul wrote: “...*I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices...*” So whether you’re young and healthy or old and decrepit, let your first conscious thoughts soar up to God every morning and He will help you manage your day.

The second verse begins: “*All praise to you who safe have kept and have refreshed me while I slept.*” These simple words contain a key principle for living in the Spirit: begin each new day with thanksgiving—NO MATTER WHAT! However rotten your circumstances are, however bleak your prospects may seem, however foreboding the future may look—you have an incredible amount to be thankful for. For openers, the God who created you has just created one more day for you to live and breathe and receive His blessings. Paul writes: “*Rejoice in the Lord always; I will say it again, rejoice! Let your forbearing spirit be evident to all. Do not be anxious about anything, but, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God that transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*” (Phil. 4:4-7) It’s so easy to fall into the habit of focusing on the negatives, on everything that’s wrong with the world and with your particular situation. The glass is half empty and things are going to pot AS USUAL. If you’re like that and Murphy’s Law has become your 11th Commandment, you might want to think about Paul’s words. If anxiety is the problem, prayer and thanksgiving are the first places to go—not your toolbox.

“*Grant, Lord, when I from death shall wake I may in endless light partake.*” These words—combined with a thankful prayer—open up a window in our minds and allow the light of eternity to shine into our souls and give us perspective. Just as we awaken each morning to the light of the sun, one day we are going to awaken to the light of glory. This verse reminds us that for believers, death is but the dawn of eternal day—and that fact puts today’s problems in their proper perspective.

“*Lord, I my vows to you renew...*” I struggled with these words for a long time. What vows? Not vows of poverty, chastity and obedience—those came from St. Francis, not from Jesus. Then what vows? Well, vows have to do with obedience and obedience has to do with the law and Jesus said that all the law is summed up in two commands: “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind,*” and “*Love your neighbor as yourself.*” And so I decided that I couldn’t go wrong by vowing each morning to do a better job of loving God and my neighbor. The only problem was: I knew in advance I’d fail. So, for a time I reasoned, what good was there in making vows I knew that I couldn’t keep? Wasn’t that hypocritical?

And then I listened to the very next phrase: “*Disperse my sins as morning dew*”—and I realized that in God’s eyes my past failures had evaporated like morning dew from the grass. It didn’t matter that I had failed to keep the vows I had made or even that I was

going to fail to keep the vows I was making at that very moment: the point was to try and do whatever I could to glorify God and just trust Him to work IN me and THROUGH me to build His kingdom—a kingdom whose citizens were commanded to love Him and to love one another. All he expected of me was to try—and He would do the rest.

And so this was a way that I could remind myself every morning that each day is truly a NEW day in God’s grace and that I was starting out with a clean heart, an upright spirit, and a brand hew hope. And with that thought in mind I could pray the next words with all my heart and soul: *“Guard my first springs of thought and will and with Yourself my spirit fill.”* Fill me with your Spirit Lord! Govern my actions, permeate my thoughts, guide my lips! Living in the Spirit means being led by the Spirit, and if you want to be led by the Spirit, *then ask Him to lead you!* And you need to do it before other spirits start to guide your thoughts—the “glass half empty” spirit and the “things are going to pot” spirit and the “Why make vows I can’t keep anyway?” spirit that excuses us from even trying. The Holy Spirit is stronger than all those other spirits put together and He is willing to lead you—*but you need to ask Him to do so!*

The next verse is not in your bulletin because it’s not in the hymnal we use. But it’s one of the original verses of the hymn, and one that’s very important to me. Oddly enough, when I first discovered the hymn, I didn’t like this verse at first at all. *“Let all my converse be sincere; my conscience as the noonday clear. Think how the all-seeing God my ways and all my secret thoughts surveys.”* All these words conjured up in my mind was the specter of a Divine Auditor who pried into my sinful thoughts all day long and just kept shaking his head in disappointment if not outright disgust.

Then it occurred to me that perhaps that was the whole point of the verse. That since I wasn’t capable of keeping my inward thoughts pure and God-pleasing, and since I was all too inclined to just give up and go with sinful thoughts, maybe I should invite God to enter into my mind and take control. I knew that there was no such thing as neutral ground—spiritually speaking, and that when the Holy Spirit is absent other spirits are present, so maybe if I invited the Holy Spirit into my mind, maybe He would drive the other spirits out. Jesus said to the Pharisees: *“First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.”* God didn’t send His Spirit into our hearts only to show us how dirty we are; he also sent Him to show us how clean we could be.

And now, the grand finale of our morning prayer for the day: *“Direct, control, suggest this day all I design or do or say.”* Oh I love those words. Lord, move me, lead me, control me, incline me in the direction you would have me go. Let everything I do today be pleasing to You. Motivate me by Your Spirit: if I’m a boat, be my rudder. I can pray those words with a completely sincere heart. But the next words give me a BIG problem: *“That all my powers with all their might in YOUR sole glory may unite.”*

Every time I sing these words, I realize that as well as seeking the Lord’s glory, I’m seeking my own. And that’s when I see the ugly face of vanity peeking up at me through all those layers and layers of piety I’ve been accumulating over the years *“That all my powers with all their might in YOUR sole glory may unite.”* Huh uh! I want the glory! I want a REWARD for working in the vineyard! I want to be known as a Godly man! I want people to think of me as someone who’s made God proud rather than as someone who’s been bailed out by him again and again and again. And every time I confront this ugly truth ***it reminds me that I am a vain and selfish person who is incapable of loving God and my neighbor more than I do myself.*** Vanity! Vanity! All is vanity!

My friends, in our sinful flesh we are bonfires of vanities who are going to burn until death finally puts out the flames once and for all. We're never going to train or discipline our sinful nature into submission. We can mortify it, we can chastise it, and God will finally kill it—but we can't reform it. We all know deep down that even the very best things we do are tainted by the desire we have for some kind of payback. In this life we are never going to quell the desires of our sinful nature, and the reason is simple: we ARE our sinful nature—and we can't deny what we ARE.

But we are also temples of the Holy Spirit of God! And by the power of this Spirit we *can* love God and our neighbor. And so, you see, we are both things at the same time—aren't we? We are sinful flesh and we are new spirits! We are saint and we are sinner. We can't explain it, we can't even understand it, but we know it's true because God said that it's true.

And God knows it too. And still He loves us and He forgives us, not because we deserve it—God knows and we know that we don't—but because God IS love and we are His beloved people. And in the face of this great and wonderful mystery all we can do is rejoice and end our hymn with the only words left to sing:

Praise God from Whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him all creatures here below;
Praise Him above ye heavenly host'
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

Amen.