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The Preacher and the Serial Killer

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Rev. Michael G. Clark is a deeply committed man. I know this because *The New York Times* reports that he was at the sentencing hearing yesterday for Dennis L. Rader, the infamous B.T.K. killer in Wichita, Kansas. Rader, now one of the nation's most notorious serial killers, was sentenced to ten life terms in prison for a brutal series of slayings that terrorized Wichita for years. He avoided the death penalty, but will not be eligible for parole for 175 years.

Pastor Clark comes into the story because he serves as pastor of Christ Lutheran Church in Wichita. When arrested earlier this year, Rader had just taken over as president of the church's congregational council. He had actually taken one of his victims to the church and had hidden torture tools in the church's shed. He was caught when police traced him through a church computer he had carelessly used.

The paper reports that Pastor Clark sat in the courtroom reading Psalm 51, even as the grieving family members of the victims poured out their sorrow and testified of their loss. When Rader addressed the court, he pointed to Pastor Clark as his "main man," adding, "If there's anybody I was dishonest to, it's that man right there."

So, why was he at the courtroom? In an interview with the paper, Pastor Clark explained, "I just tell people . . . would you want me to stop coming to see you if I were your pastor?"

I don't know much about Pastor Michael G. Clark. I don't know how he is processing the whole reality of Dennis Rader and his unspeakable acts of evil. I can't imagine how he is reflecting on the reality that this man lived among them, gaining their confidence even as he abused their trust and connected their church to his murders. I can only wonder how a church picks up the pieces and preaches the Gospel after such a humiliation and so much devastation.

All I know is that in this very public moment of national attention — with every reason to run and hide — this pastor sat in the courtroom and read Psalm 51. That was a demonstration of rare pastoral courage, given by a man who must surely bear a broken heart. It should not go unnoticed.

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.

Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; build up the walls of Jerusalem; then will you delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings; then bulls will be offered on your altar.

Psalm 51, *English Standard Version*

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