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Rev. Debra McGuire

Bethany Presbyterian Church

Psalm 27; Luke 13:31-35

March 16, 2025 – Lent 2

***Psalm 27***

***The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?***

***2When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh—my adversaries and foes—they shall stumble and fall.***

***3Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident.***

***4One thing I asked of the Lord; this I seek: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.***

***5For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will set me high on a rock.***

***6Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the Lord.***

***7Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud; be gracious to me and answer me!   
8“Come,” my heart says, “seek his face!” Your face, Lord, do I seek.  
9    Do not hide your face from me. Do not turn your servant away in anger, you who have been my help. Do not cast me off; do not forsake me, O God of my salvation!  
10If my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will take me up.***

***11Teach me your way, O Lord, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies.  
12Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries, for false witnesses have risen against me, and they are breathing out violence.***

***13I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.  
14Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!***

***Luke 13:31-35***

***31At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” 32He said to them, “Go and tell that fox for me, ‘Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. 33Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.’ 34Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! 35See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’ ”***

I was at breakfast yesterday with my mom and a good friend of ours. Our conversation included a discussion of the constant struggle that is built into our desire to follow truthful news and information. That struggle being how to balance the need and desire to be informed with the need to stay healthy. Our friend told this perfect story about that.

She is a subscriber to The New York Times so she gets emails from them all the time. Once in a while subscribers get a little something extra. One of these extras turned out to be a news quiz to test how well informed you were. There were about 15 questions. As she was answering the questions and seeing how many she was getting right she was feeling pretty good. A score of 13 out of 15. Right after that she got an email from The New York Times saying “You probably need a rest.”

Can anyone relate to this dilemma? And yet, there’s this feeling out there sometimes that we people of faith are supposed to feel completely protected from the harshness of the world because we know God is with us, and knows what we need. If we feel uncertain or worried we might be told that we just need to trust God more, or our faith is weak. It’s not that simple though is it. Psalm 27 holds this tension for us very nicely.

Here is how I *aspire* to feel on a day when my faith is strong. Listen and ask yourself if you feel the same:

***The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?***

***2When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh—my adversaries and foes—they shall stumble and fall.***

***3Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident.***

***4One thing I asked of the Lord; this I seek: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.***

***5For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will set me high on a rock.***

***6Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the Lord.***

Here is how I feel if I watch the news too much, don’t eat properly, am not well rested, and live inside my head full of worry instead of in the real world where there is at least a *chance* of experiencing real beauty and hope. Listen and ask yourself if you feel the same:

***7Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud; be gracious to me and answer me!   
8“Come,” my heart says, “seek his face!” Your face, Lord, do I seek.  
9    Do not hide your face from me. Do not turn your servant away in anger, you who have been my help. Do not cast me off; do not forsake me, O God of my salvation!  
10If my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will take me up.***

***11Teach me your way, O Lord, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies.  
12Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries, for false witnesses have risen against me, and they are breathing out violence.***

After both of these opposing beliefs are said and done, here is where I hope to land. Listen and ask yourself if you feel the same:

***13I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.  
14Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!***

“One of the most heartening things about this psalm is that faith and confidence do not seem to be contingent on having “arrived” at the place of absolute safety.”4 This psalm reassures us that the same person who believes the first six lines can also cry out as do the next six lines. “Psalm 27 confirms that this is what happens, not because we are bad or sub-optimal or have weak faith.”1 The last two lines then leave us waiting and hoping, not hiding behind our rose colored glasses or sunk into the darkness of despair.

During Lent we often take time to consider our own mortality and obstacles to our own spiritual lives. Beginning with ashes on Ash Wednesday and continuing through until Jesus’ death on Good Friday we read scripture and consider Jesus’ own path toward his final days in Jerusalem. Last week we focused on Jesus’ time in the wilderness, and today we focus on the start of Jesus’ path to that city. We will spend the journey of Lent reading from the gospel of Luke, chapter 4, then chapter 13 late, then chapter 13 earlier, then the gospel of John, then back to Luke chapter 15, then the gospel of John, back to Luke 19, and then back to the gospel of John again. That is to say, all of the scripture during Lent is not in order of the chapters in the Bible or even from the same gospel. But rather the scripture is in an order that will highlight the entire journey of Jesus, from wilderness to his death. Scripture is chosen for the season itself, not as part of a history lesson. Today’s readings both share a good news/bad news theme.

For several chapters prior to today’s scripture reading, Jesus has been performing a few miracles and has told many, many parables. Into this setting, some Pharisees came to see Jesus. Now some historians have said that of the ruling elite, the Pharisees were less interested in the Roman government than the Saduccees, another Jewish sect at the time. However, the Pharisees did know that if Jesus continued his preaching and teaching he would run afoul of the Roman authorities and the Pharisees simply did not want the chaos.3 So they made this “friendly” end run to get Jesus to stop his activities, by warning him. They said to him, ***“Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.”***

Herod. Jesus knew all about Herod. When Jesus was born, it was Herod the Great who wanted the baby found so that there would not be a threat to Herod’s kingdom. That desire was thwarted when those wise men left the manger and traveled home a different way. But Herod had several sons, who inherited a portion of land after Herod the Great’s death. One of those sons, Antipas, was the regional ruler in the area of Galilee. The Roman authorities didn’t even let Antipas call himself king; instead he was the Tetrarch Herod Antipas. He is the same Herod who killed John the Baptist. Herod Antipas certainly knew that Jesus was indeed that same baby, grown, who it was said was going to be a threat to Herod’s kingdom. Herod Antipas didn’t want anything to do with John the Baptist, or Jesus. And Jesus knew that. Thus, Jesus’ reply to the warning from the Pharisees.

***32[Jesus] said to them, “Go and tell that fox for me, ‘Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. 33Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.’***

Much of our Lenten study, from the gospel of Luke, refers to time outside of time. Remember the devil left Jesus in the wilderness only to return “at an opportune time.” Our reading today begins with “At that hour….” Jesus’ reply to the Pharisees refers to “today and tomorrow and on the third day”, or “the next day.” Jesus’ God-ordained work of casting out demons, performing cures will not be stopped by a ruler trying to outwit Jesus, or threats of harm. Even as Jesus exclaims to the Pharisees, he also deeply laments the refusal of his own people to draw near to this sacred call from God. Long known to be the city where many prophets have met their end, Jesus is heartbroken and calls out one more chance for his people to follow him.

***34Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!***

Jesus’ has referred to three days – today, tomorrow, and on the third day – foreshadowing his death and resurrection on the third day. Again, Luke gives Jesus words that are talking about time outside of time. “Until the time comes…” leaving his listeners to wonder.

***35See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’ ”***

Those very same words that we will shout as Jesus rides into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.2

Scripture tells us that Jesus was confident and sure of his role, his life, his sacred journey, while at the same time, going off to pray often lamenting, and even at the end, asking if God could somehow take this cup from him. Jesus likely use Psalm 27 in his own prayer life often. Sometimes certain of God's providence, and sometimes crying out to God to not be forgotten.

When our lives are filled with too much as they are in these days of fast and furious information gathering and sharing, with no time to consider consequences or outcomes or make plans for our own immediate or later future, we might need to consider taking a rest – even without a suggestion from the New York Times. Maybe we can even use the final lines of today’s Psalm to carry with us, as we experience life’s ups and downs and turmoil that surrounds us.

***Let us, believe that we shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.  
We shall wait for the Lord; be strong, and let our hearts take courage; wait for the Lord!***

Let’s pray,

1<https://cepreaching.org/commentary/2025-03-10/psalm-27-4/>

Hoeze, Scott, March 2025

2 <https://cepreaching.org/commentary/2025-03-10/luke-1331-35-4/>

Harmon, Chelsey, March 2025

3<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/second-sunday-in-lent-3/commentary-on-luke-1331-35-6>

Swanson, Richard W., March 2025

4<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/second-sunday-in-lent-3/commentary-on-psalm-27-6>

Bechtel, Susan, March 2025