



The Lord Is Your Light

Psalm 27:1-5; 13-14
Romans 8:31-39

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“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?” Psalm 27:1

This morning we conclude a two-part mini-series of sermons from the Psalms. From time to time I learn from people that a certain scripture passage has been a favorite and special one for them along their journey through life. I thank God for such spiritual assurances in your lives, and if you have such a favorite verse or selection of verses, I invite you to tell me about it! This morning I have chosen to preach on a passage that has given me great assurance and encouragement over the years.

Prayer for Illumination: *Lord, break the bread of your Word among us and nourish us with your truth. In the name of Christ Jesus we pray. Amen*

PSALM 27:1-5; 13-14

Episcopal writer Suzanne Guthrie records these thoughts: “When I lie on my bed at night I hear my heart beating. A great silence surrounds me in the dark. Why does my heart pound so loudly in my chest? Should I be concerned and consult a physician? By day my life distracts me, but in the silence of the night I hear my heart beating.”

“I tend to worry at night”, she continues, “over money and bills, over my health, over my children and friends. I find myself agonizing over my consistent lack of faith and over my own failings in life and in relationships.”

I know what she means. I guess we all do. We spend a fair chunk of time being worried and afraid. The familiar words of Psalm 27 go by so smoothly that we do not really listen. “**The Lord is my light and my salvation...**?” Is that your source of courage when things look dismal? Or is that one of the lines you say when the sun is shining; when a child or grandchild is born; or on a day when all is right with the world? My sense is that we have some of those ‘high water’ days, but precious few.

Whom shall I fear?" It may have been written as a rhetorical question, but we're not sure we want to give the rhetorical answer. "No one." "Nothing." Those words do not come easily to our lips. We spend a fair chunk of our time being anxious and afraid.

Psalms – or hymn-poems – take on new meanings as times change. When David wrote these words and talked about "**evil men advancing against me,**" David was describing an actual military situation with his troops on one side of the valley and the forces of the Philistines on the other. In later years the "enemies and foes" changed. But no matter what the times and circumstances, some opposing host was always out there. There was reason to be afraid. The Psalm was always relevant.

In our day and time the host that is encamped against us may be carcinogens or destructive viruses. We read disturbing reports about the biological ingenuity of these microorganisms to recreate themselves in ever more venomous forms, and of our inability to combat or control what they can do to our bodies once they get a foothold. A host has encamped against us. Words like Parkinson's and Alzheimer's, cancer, the Swine Flu, and a host of others, are realities we would just as soon avoid. They seem larger than we are, dominant and uncontrollable.

"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"? Do these words offer comfort to us? Can we find safety – assurance – in these psalm-sentiments?

Only, of course, if the Lord is the stronghold of our life. Only if we are willing to connect faith to history and experience. Only if we are willing to admit that there is more to reality than our accumulated wisdom and knowledge. Only if we are willing to come out of the shadows, to risk – to rely on – the 'foolishness' of faith.

I recently reread a poem written by Maya Angelou. She talked about our having long hidden in the shadow of the rock: "But today," she writes, "the Rock cries out to us, clearly, forcefully..."

Come, you may stand upon my back and face your destiny,
But seek no haven in my shadow.
I will give you no hiding place down here.
You, created only a little lower than the angels,
Have crouched too long in the bruising darkness,
Have lain too long face down in ignorance...
The Rock cries out to us today, you may stand upon me,
But do not hide your face."

The Psalmist voices the same ideas when he writes that the Lord "**will set me high upon a rock; and now my head will be lifted up above my enemies...and I will sing and make melody to the Lord.**" (verses 5b-6) Can we picture ourselves in that position? Probably not.

In the face of a threat we hide behind the rock, hoping that its shadow will cover us, and even shield us from whatever is against us. No one will see us; nothing will find us; the Pastor will not ask us a question; the teacher will not call on us; the IRS will not select us

for audit; the mugger will not come up behind us or the thief break into our home; and the germs will not track us down. Not here! Not in the shadow of the rock, where not a bit of us is exposed!

Is this to be the picture of our lives? Not according to the Psalmist. God will set us on top of the rock—head and shoulders above the people and the things that threaten us. But that is crazy. Standing there vulnerable – exposed – to all that we know to be ominous and overpowering, to the things that go bump in the night, to our adversaries, to the host of those encamped against us?! That is crazy! Some of what threatens us does not yield to money or intellect or influence. It is not crushed by our physical strength or moral character. It is no respecter of persons. How could we possibly stand up and not be afraid?

Because “**the Lord is the stronghold of my life,**” the Lord is my source of strength. “**Though a war arise against me, yet I will be confident.**” Here is the place where we test the strength of our convictions, relying on that which we cannot prove. *Now is the time we allow faith to lead us to courage.*

How many years? How many sermons? How many times have we heard the words of safety and deliverance? And yet we are still afraid. We are still afraid because parenting and grand-parenting is not a science and nothing can stop our children and grandchildren from making poor choices; we are still afraid because three people in our family have died of cancer before they were sixty and none of them smoked or ate foolishly; because we are seriously financially over-extended and who knows what other surprises lie ahead; because there is so much that we want to set right in our life and in our world and nothing that we do seems to help; because while we’ve worked hard to put things nicely in place for our retirement, we are all too aware of the unexpected events that can so quickly change everything; we are afraid because our problems overwhelm us and leave us wallowing in uncertainty.

O God, Sunday morning passes too quickly – and what sounded so good for an hour, is forgotten by Monday morning. Facing what I face – knowing what I know – I’d have to be crazy not to be afraid.

Right now I invite you to close your eyes (those of you who don’t already have them closed!). With your eyes closed, let me tell you what you need to see. Picture a big circle. Inside that circle is your life. If you are a Christian, Jesus Christ is at the center. You need to see that you are not at the center of the circle, that you are not carrying the world on your shoulder. That world – in the words of the spiritual, – is in God’s hands, and so are you. With that picture in your mind, open your eyes.

You see our courage is not drawn on denial. We do not live pretending that threats and dangers are not real, that health concerns and family situations are not matters of critical importance. But we do see all of that from a different perspective. God is our light. That is what enables us to see what is actually out there. And the first thing that we see is that God is also our salvation. We cannot be destroyed. That is the only reason the Psalmist

can write that he has no one to fear. Who he is, is established in a relationship to a strong and faithful God who will not let anything destroy that identity or that relationship. Do not be afraid. God has set you up on the rock. Your foot will not slip. Your enemies and your worries will not overpower you. Nothing – nothing – nothing – in all of life can destroy you, or separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord!

THE LORD IS YOUR LIGHT AND YOUR SALVATION;
THE LORD IS THE STRONGHOLD OF YOUR LIFE;
OF WHOM, THEN, DO YOU EVER NEED TO BE AFRAID?

NO ONE! NOTHING!

AMEN...