

2nd SUNDAY IN LENT
March 17, 2019

Text: Psalm 27

Theme: Whom Shall We Fear?

For the last eighteen months twelve of us have been meeting every Wednesday morning (with occasional breaks built in) to read and study a book of the Bible every week. We started with Genesis and are working our way through Revelation (with only three classes left). It has been an awesome experience because now we see more clearly the consistent messages that are repeated throughout Scripture.

Here are some of those messages: God is merciful and God does not punish us as we ought to be punished. God is with us and will never abandon us even when we are disobedient because the grace of God is greater than our sin. It is the grace of God that covered the penalty for our sin and that took place when Christ died on the cross and rose again. Once and for all Christ overcame sin and death and the power of evil. And after his death and resurrection we are reminded that our identity in God (and as disciples of Christ) along with the gift of the Holy Spirit teaches us to love as God through Christ has loved us.

And here is one more message that is repeated the most in Scripture: God is constantly telling his people – *Do not be afraid.*

It is so frequent that we heard it today in the Old Testament lesson. The Lord came to Abram in a vision and told him not to be afraid. Joseph used those words when he was reunited with his brothers. Moses repeated them when the people trembled at the sound of the trumpet and as they witnessed thunder and lightning in the sky and smoke coming from the mountain. Before the birth of Christ, the angel of the Lord told Zechariah, Mary and Joseph not to be afraid. Jesus calmed his disciples with these same words when he was seen walking on water and they thought he was a ghost. We have example after example of someone attempting to quiet the fears of the people.

So why does Scripture lift up this message more than any other? We answer that question in light of the gospel lesson from last Sunday. God understands better than we do that the greatest temptation the devil will throw at us is that he is able to introduce fear into our lives.

Almost every day we seem to worry and become anxious about something and it grows with age. Our fears as a teenager include being accepted by our peers or being good enough to enter the college we want to attend. It moves to fears over our marriages and our children and our finances. And then there are the health concerns and the ultimate fear of dying as we get older. Like all the other temptations we talked about last week we are never immune from some reason to be afraid.

Last week Jesus affirmed for us that with Christ in our lives we can beat any temptation and with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit we can have the strength to resist those things that pull us away from God. And as our third resource we were encouraged to open our Bibles ... so this morning we turn to Psalm 27 (a favorite to many) to learn how to face our fears.

It starts with familiar words:

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?

And from there the author tackles the personal attacks he has suffered from his adversaries who are out to get him. Scholars are not sure who wrote the different psalms but this one is attributed to David. And if the author is David then let us pause for a minute and reflect on his life because he had lots of experience with fear. As a small boy David was the one who stood before the giant named Goliath with only a slingshot in his hand. Later he was in the courts of King Saul and Saul grew jealous of him to the point where David had to run for his life. David then had to deal with his son, Absalom, who wanted to run him out of his own kingdom. And then there was Bathsheba and the fear of divine punishment.

If the author was indeed David then he had enemies all around him. He had trouble at home. His life was in jeopardy. And in this psalm we hear his response:

I will not fear. I will not be afraid. I will be confident.

I will shout with joy. I will sing and make melody to the Lord.

No matter what is going on in my life I will be strong.

I will let my heart take courage.

And then we are given the reason the author can say these things. It is because he knows who God is ... the Lord is his light and his salvation. The Lord is his stronghold. He does not face his fears based on what God will do for him. He does not seem to care when or how God will respond. He is not clinging to some promise that things will turn out the way he hopes they will turn out.

It is enough to know that the Lord is his light.
The Lord is his salvation. The Lord is his strength.

The author of the psalm is inviting us to take anything we fear (fear of the unknown, fear of loss, rejection, separation, pain, disappointment, failure) and compare it to who God is (omnipotent and magnificent and all-knowing and loving and sovereign) and then trust that God lead us out of our darkness into the light of his love.

As the psalmist continues he reminds us that our fears are not only personal but they are global. There are whole systems in our world that cause people to fear such as the inequities we experience when we label people a certain way. Some fear a nuclear war and some fear we are destroying our planet. Our psalmist encourages us not to be afraid (because we know who God is) and to be confident because of what God has done in the past. We are to be confident because all throughout salvation history God has shown us a consistent pattern. God is merciful. God is with us and will never abandon us. And from this pattern we can draw a safe conclusion that God will once more deliver us from our fears no matter how powerful they seem at the moment.

Remember that the author has no idea how things will unfold in the future. He has no way of knowing if his world will be turned upside down (or not). So he asks for one thing and one thing only ... to live in the house of the Lord for the rest of his days so he can behold the beauty of the Lord. I am not so sure that would be our response. If our fear is darkness then we want some light. If we fear rejection then we want to see some sign that we are accepted for who we are. If our finances are stretched then we want some job opportunities to come our way.

But to live in the house of the Lord ... what kind of request is that?

The author is teaching us that he wants 24/7 access to God and to his beauty. In order to face his struggles he needs to live in the presence of God. Once more he does not ask for his troubles to be removed but just to keep the door of his house open. When those fears return he just wants God to keep his arms open and surround him with love. In verse 5 he wants to hide in the shelter of God. It is interesting that in Hebrew the word *to hide* does not mean to remove from sight but to put someone in a place where they can see what is going on but they cannot be touched and hurt by the other.

Let the light of God surround us and protect us. Over time the hope is that we will grow more comfortable reducing our fears and living from our faith. With the psalmist we seek that place of safety that nothing can touch. The Lord is our light and our salvation. The Lord is our stronghold. We will not fear. We will not be afraid. We will be confident. We will shout with joy. We will sing praises to the Lord. Be strong and let our hearts take courage. Amen