

“This Psalm Is for You”
Sermon by Lisa Crismore
John Knox Presbyterian Church – February 24, 2013

Psalm 27

The Lord is my light and salvation; whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life; whom shall I be afraid?

When evildoers come to assail me to devour my flesh – my adversaries and foes – they shall stumble and fall.

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

One thing I ask of the Lord, that will I seek after; 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.

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

Now 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.

Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud be gracious to me and answer me!

“Come”, my heart says, “seek his face!” Your face Lord, do I seek. Do not hide your face from me.

Do not turn your servant away in anger, you have been my help.

Do not cast me off, do not forsake me, O God of my salvation!

If my mother and father forsake me, my Lord will take me up.

Teach me your way, O Lord, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies.

Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries, for false witnesses have risen against me, and they are breathing out violence.

I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord.

This past week on “Good Morning America” the cast and crew welcomed back Robin Roberts. Robin is one of the main anchors for the show. She had been off of work for several months due to going through and recovering from a bone marrow transplant. Robin had a disorder simply called “MDS” or a more technical term, Myelodysplastic Syndrome. This blood disorder, if not treated, can lead to leukemia and is caused in Robin’s case from a cancer treatment she received five years ago from her surviving breast cancer.

I have been amazed by her story. Her main themes throughout this illness have been “faith, family, friends” and “light, love, power, presence”. As you watch from camera view, many times you will see Robin point to the sky as she gives God the praise and the glory for her courage and perseverance.

Prayer was huge as she shared that many viewers had tweeted on her twitter account that they were praying for her. On her return day, there was a woman who had sent her a huge poster of inspirational sayings and prayers encouraging her to keep the faith. Robin shared that this was kept by her bedside and it was something she focused on every day.

The prayer from the Psalmist today speaks very clearly of the journey Robin traveled on as she spent 174 days fighting with God’s power on her side to survive. I don’t know if this was her own personal prayer but I am sure she can relate to the words “The Lord is my

light and salvation, whom shall I fear?" As Robin stated back in August, 2012, when she shared the news of her illness, she will beat this thing. Using the words of the Psalmist, her enemy, evildoer, trouble and war were her illness. She was able to rise up above it. She is able to sing and rejoice over her triumph.

I am sure just like the Psalmist there were days that Robin questioned where God was, when fear and doubt crept in. "Please answer me and don't hide your face from me, Lord." I need to know that you are there! Where are you in the silence?

You all know I like movies and I am very excited because tonight is the Oscars! One of the films for best picture is "Life of Pi". It is a beautiful film about a 16 year old boy who finds himself stranded in a lifeboat after his family perishes in a freighter which was bound for America. His family had owned a zoo and many of the animals were on board the freighter. So to make things very complicated and interesting, he ends up on the lifeboat with a zebra, an orangutan, a hyena and a tiger. The youth, whose name is Pi, has a tremendous faith in God and throughout the movie he prays constantly as he fights to survive! He too questions God's presence after being on the boat for months. Twice he tells God, "You have taken everything away from me except my life. I surrender totally to you. It is all in your hands."

Both Robin and Pi were so focused on their relationship with God. Their survival, their whole being was dependent on God. It was in those desperate times that we also find the Psalmist.

So why are the story about Robin and Pi so important to us? I was drawn to Robin's story because she is 52 years old. She is a little over one month younger than I am. Her story could be my story! In fact, her story and Pi's story are many times our stories. We all face the enemy or the tiger sometime in our lives. We have all ridden that roller coaster where we have had our ups and downs; and some more frequently than others.

We can relate to the silence of God, when we hear the Psalmist say, "Do not cast me off, do not forsake me, I know you can help me! Please don't hide your face!" How do we live when God is silent? I think the thing we have to ask ourselves is, "How do we listen to God?" Barbara Brown Taylor writes, "Even now, some Christians have trouble listening to God. Many of us prefer to speak. Our corporate prayers are punctuated with phrases such as "Hear us, Lord: or "Lord, hear our prayer," as if the burden to listen were on God and not us. We name our concerns, giving God suggestions on what to do about them. What reversal of power might occur if we turned the process around, naming our concerns and asking God to tell us what to do about them? "Speak, Lord, for your servants are listening." (When God is Silent; by Barbara Brown Taylor; Cowley Publication; 1998)

I know for me I just need to shut-up and listen. But that is so difficult, especially when I need an answer. I had a conversation with Kim Grant this week. She was told by a pastor that listening to God takes practice. For me, it also takes patience. I have to work at shutting out all the noise and chaos that is going on in my life so that I can listen.

Hear the Psalmist words, "Teach me your way, O Lord and lead me on a level path." I believe God is silent sometimes just because that is the mystery of God. God will do what God will do and we can't control God. We have to do what the Psalmist says and wait! Wait on the Lord!

What would have happened if Robin Roberts would not have survived the bone marrow transplant or what if her breast cancer returns? Would God have loved her any less by not answering her prayers? Thomas Long, a great theologian and writer would say, absolutely not! In the book *When God IS Silent*, Barbara Brown Taylor, says think about Christ who prays to God in the garden to take this cup away from me, God never responds. Even on the cross, Christ asks, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" God loved his own Son, Jesus Christ and God loves us. Sometimes God is just silent but we have to know that God is always present. (When God is Silent; by Barbara Brown Taylor; Cowley Publication; 1998)

We find ourselves a week and half into our Lenten season. We are given this time to focus on our relationship with Christ so that we can be prepared to welcome him on Easter morning as our risen Lord.

Barbara Brown Taylor says Lent is a time to separate ourselves from the things we turn to in life that give us comfort. (Home by Another Way; by Barbara Brown Taylor; Cowley Publication; 1999) What are the things that give us comfort? Are they chocolate cake, a cushy couch, flannel sheets, computer games or hours on Facebook. We are expected to turn to God to seek that comfort. Barbara Brown Taylor goes so far as to say we need to pull the pacifiers out of our mouths and really draw our strength, our courage, our shelter from God! We are to put away all the "stuff" in our life and focus on our relationship with our creator, redeemer and sustainer. (Home by Another Way; by Barbara Brown Taylor; Cowley Publication; 1999)

In your bulletin, you will find a purple insert that is titled, "A Lenten Season of ..." The first thing on this list is prayer. On one side are suggestions on how to travel your Lenten journey and on the other side there are empty spaces for you to fill-in your own personal prayers, goals, accomplishments. Please use these. Please take them home and not leave them in the recycling bin. Please use this time to pray! Pray for yourself and pray for others. Robin Roberts is a celebrity and she had people praying for her all over the world. We have celebrities in our congregation, our saints, who are struggling. Take the prayer list in your bulletin; you can use it to pray for others. I know many have shared with me that you already do this. This might be at time where you start your day with a body prayer or perhaps stop by the church on Wednesday mornings at 6:30 and have time alone with God.

Let us pray, O God you are our light and salvation! Help us to know that you are there even in the silence. Give us the strength, courage and perseverance to weather the storms in our lives. Grant us patience and show us how to practice being quiet so you can speak! Direct us and teach us how to wait on you! We give you thanks for your love and grace which you give to us through your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.