

February 28, 2010

Scripture: Psalm 27

Sermon: "Heart of Courage"

This Scripture doesn't seem very much like a Scripture that would be read during the season of Lent. This Scripture seems to be more appropriate to be read during the Season of Advent with all this talking about "waiting upon the Lord". When we think of Lent, our minds don't immediately go to waiting upon the Lord. Our minds usually go towards images of journeys, images of the cross, images of wilderness and the notion of "waiting for the Lord" gets lost in translation. But that's the good news of Psalm 27. That's the guiding light of Psalm 27. That's why we read Psalm 27 during the Season of Lent.

As we journey and make new discoveries, we sometimes lose our way. We sometimes forget that God is working in the world. We sometimes forget that the darkness does not have the last word. And we begin to wonder where is God? We begin to wonder why God is not working in our world? We begin to wonder how God can let this happen?

As we journey through Lent, we don't want to face the darkness, the despair, the suffering along the way and Psalm 27 reminds us that it doesn't work that way, God doesn't work that way, life doesn't work that way.

Psalm 27 reminds us to wait upon the Lord. Psalm 27 reminds us to remember that God has acted in the past and God will act again. Psalm 27 reminds us to have hearts of courage even when the darkness threatens to overtake the light. Psalm 27 gives us hope for the journey, strength for the journey, courage for the journey because it reminds us that the only way we can be true to our calling as people of God is to have a heart of courage grounded in the trust and secure in the knowledge that God watches over us, protects us, guides us, no matter what mountains or valleys of death that we might pass through along the way.

Psalm 27 is considered to be a lament psalm and really is two halves making a whole. The first part has a resounding confidence stating the Lord is my Light and my Salvation, who shall I fear? The Lord is my stronghold, who shall I fear? Not much of a lament but a reminder to the author that to be a person of faith is to understand that God holds us in the palm of God's hand. As the author reminds himself and us as readers, that God has acted in the past and God will act again, he changes his tone and reminds God of this fact as well. He shares that his world is falling apart. People are slandering his name, wanting a piece of his soul. He feels himself drowning in a pit of darkness and the author has the courage and the confidence to say: God, this is not right. God you need to do something about this situation right now.

Now let me say for us modern readers, we might think that the author has a lot of nerve, questioning God, demanding that God act as we read this Psalm. But that is the beauty and the foundation of our faith that we proclaim as God's people. We are in a relationship with God and as we journey, we experience the good, the bad, the ugly, and the breath-takingly beautiful with God. In our relationship with God, there is accountability for us as people of faith and for God. Please don't hear me say that when we hold God accountable, that we think we are God or put ourselves in God's place. When we hold God accountable, it is a reminder that God is God. The same God who made the highest mountain. The same God who made the delicate butterfly

wings. The same God who placed the stars in heavens and the same God who formed us and knows us completely.

God is God. And for God to be God, God must act in certain ways. God is a God of justice. God is a God of peace. God is a God of grace. And God is a God of Love.

And this is the God that calls us to be in relationship with God. And in this relationship, we are called to bring our joys, our concerns, our anger, our sorrows, our celebrations, our doubts and all through it all, have the courage to say: "The Lord is my salvation. Who shall I fear? The Lord is my stronghold. Who shall I fear?"

Because we understand that "faith in God does not spare [us] as God's servants from difficulties. But faith equips us to live with courage and with hope despite the difficulties of life." As people of faith, we are called to trust in God especially when "life circumstances seem to call God's trustworthiness into question."

And that's the good news of Psalm 27. The author remembers and celebrates that he is God's own, created, claimed and named. The author remembers that God has acted in the past and God will act again. The author remembers that even though the darkness threatens to overtake the light, the light will not fully be extinguished because God has the last word.

And so he reminds himself and reminds us today that as people of faith, as we journey to the cross, as we journey through life and experience all of life's ups and downs, we are called to wait expectantly upon the Lord with hearts of courage, secure in the knowledge of God's promises and celebrate that God holds us in the palm of God's hand.

The author reminds us that we hold to the promise that one day we will be a part of God's Kingdom, where God will rule, where there will be no more pain, where there will be no more suffering but in the meantime the author reminds us that it will take courage to live as a person of faith in a world where darkness threatens to take over. It will take courage to be strengthened by the promises of God to proclaim the Good News in the midst of a world that is broken, hurting, and disconnected. It will take hearts of courage to proclaim that this world does not have the last word. God does. It will take courage to travel the path and journey to the cross this Lenten season.

When we hear these words from Psalm 27 along our Lenten journey, they remind us that sometimes we place our trust in things, in abilities, in ourselves before we place our trust in God. These words of Psalm 27 remind us that we sometimes gain a sense of false courage because we think we can handle the situation on our own or that we have an arsenal of weapons that we can rely on to defeat any situation.

These words of Psalm 27 remind us that all of those things are temporary. They fade with time. They break down. They fail. They crumble in despair. Our bodies begin to creak and crack more with each passing year. And only God remains. Only God is sure. Psalm 27 reminds us that only by having faith in God do we have the true courage to live the life of a child of God. Because it is not an easy life. Because as a child of God, we are responsible to God. We are

responsible to and for our neighbors. Because as children of God, we are called to help bring about the Kingdom of God here on earth.

We will be called into some difficult situations. We will have to give voice to the voiceless. We will have to be pushed out of our comfort zones. We may have to go to place that are unknown. We may have to speak out against the injustices that we see in our community around us. We may find ourselves in situations where we are on opposite sides from our family and our friends. We may even have to love our neighbors as ourselves. It will take courage, courage grounded and secure in God's promises, courage sustained by trust in God because "to have courage is to speak from the heart, to listen to our heart, and to act from our heart."

We are called to be a people with hearts of courage. And through all of life's highest mountain top experiences and lowest valleys of the shadows of death, we are to wait upon the Lord, to be strong, and to let our heart take courage. Psalm 27 reminds us that the Lord is our light and our salvation whom shall we fear? The Lord is our stronghold. Whom shall we fear?

Hear the Good News: There is courage in waiting. There is courage in preparing for the coming of the Lord. There is courage in continuing the journey to the cross. There is courage is trusting in the Lord.

It takes courage to live the life of a Christian in a world that is suffering, that tells us God doesn't care, that God will not act on our behalf, that God has deserted us. It takes courage for us to take that first step, secure in the knowledge that God's arms are holding us up, that God's hands will catch us when we fall, and celebrating that God will pick us up again, dust us off, and support us along our journey. It takes hearts of courage to reorient one's self to way of God's love and God's grace working in the world. It takes hearts of courage to be in true relationship with God and with God's people. It takes hearts of courage to work to bring about God's Kingdom here on earth.

The Lord is our light and our salvation. Whom shall we fear? The Lord is our stronghold. Whom shall we fear?

May we have hearts of courage as we take our first steps as children of God, secure in the knowledge that God hold us in the palm of God's hand. Amen.