

Sunday November 12 2023  
Lesson 11: Finding Home in Unusual Places  
Scripture: Psalm 27

**Context:**

Today we continue our fall curriculum, “God Provides.” The third unit is titled “Shelter,” with several lessons focusing on shelter and what physical security means theologically. Today’s lesson is the second in the unit and is found in the book of Psalms. The focus of today’s lesson will be to discern God’s presence when we feel frightened and alone.

This is another lesson from the book of Psalms, continuing the theme of how psalms name both the truth of God being with humanity even as humanity cries out to God in need of deliverance and assurance. Throughout the book of Psalms, there are numerous psalms where a psalmist names both the present or perceived danger around them. They cry out to the only place where security or care will come from; the Lord God who gives them life.

Psalm 27 falls in this category of both thanksgiving and supplication being named before God. Psalm 27 is a favorite of many individuals because it expresses the central impulse of biblical religion, trust in the Lord with eloquent words and images.<sup>1</sup> The form of the psalm is a bit unusual compared to other psalms as it can be found with two different pleas to God. Because of the difference in style and function of the two parts, some have concluded the psalms have been joined together to create Psalm 27 uniting both the trust named in the Lord along with the real prayers of those who face persecution or affliction.<sup>2</sup> Throughout the psalm there are repeating motifs to bind the portions together.

The first part of the psalm gives both declarations about God and the self. God is light, salvation and refuge to the psalmist. God’s presence stands to counter what the psalmist faces in the world, including the slander of evildoers or the attacks of a hostile army. There is so much trust in the Lord, the one request from the psalmist is to be in the sanctuary “in the day of trouble” so the psalmist may worship the Lord.

The second part of the psalm involves the psalmist naming petitions where they pray the Lord will hear and help them. First, the psalmist names the “seeking the face of the Lord,” a call given to ancient Israelites to go to holy places to ask the Lord’s favor and help.<sup>3</sup> Second, the prayer of trust names how the Lord is even more faithful than one’s parents, standing ready to help the servant.<sup>4</sup> Thirdly, the psalmist names the trials they face in front of them with a waiting upon the Lord for help. The words of the psalm and scholars suggest this prayer is lifted up as a

---

<sup>1</sup> Mays, James L. “Psalms,” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1994), 130.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

metaphor for the typical opposition faithful individuals and communities experience. Verbal assaults, slander, malicious reports, and evaluations mark the course of the life of the faithful over the history of the people of God.<sup>5</sup> The psalmist trusts God to deliver them in the face of these trials and tribulations.

The psalm names many important concepts, perhaps the biggest part being how trust and need with the Lord are related. The ultimate vulnerability before God is a gift in the threats of life, transforming mere anxiety to prayer. God gives humanity an invitation to name the inner parts of one's soul and to stand before the Lord with trust in the one who loves us.

### **Application**

Do you remember the first time you ever felt alone or frightened? Perhaps it was early on when the lights went out in your house, and you couldn't see a thing; leading to fits until a nightlight was installed with either a solution or a still unsatisfactory attitude. Maybe for you it was middle school when you discovered the adage "sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me," rang hollow due to bullies or worse, friendship betrayals. Even still, it might be a moment in adulthood when you see things change, and you feel unsure of the world around you.

No human, even as strong or courageous or as cheerful as they might be, has ever gone throughout this life with at least once being alone or frightened. It is almost a rite of passage of experiencing the sinking feeling of nowhere or no one to turn to. Hopefully for all though there is the relief to come in some way and we can pocket the experience as one we may not like, and yet we will never forget it.

The beauty of Psalm 27 is we hear how this is a normal experience, one which comes even to those in the life of faith. As Christians we are not exempt from the realities of daily living as we too all have experiences where we feel alone and frightened. Sometimes it comes from the forces outside the church and sometimes sadly, it can come from within the church body.

Yet our psalmist names even as we might discover misplaced trust or hopes in others, we do have another source of light in the darkness. We have the Lord who is our light, our rock, and our salvation. No matter what we face or what trials we endure, there is the Lord whose love and grace stands there for us no matter what we face. The Lord God is the one who when all things seem fleeting or out of our control, the Lord God stands ready there in the darkness to be with us even when we are still anxious or afraid.

Perhaps the most interesting thing the psalmist names is the vulnerability we feel when there are those around us who slander or attack us, perhaps even wearing the veils as those we know or hold close to us. Sadly, it is my conclusion these are some of the most isolating experiences in human life. As a pastor, I have seen both individuals and my congregation(s) hurt by people they loved, who come at them with slander and false allegations despite all these faithful individuals or congregations have done with love in their hearts. I have seen my colleagues attacked by people, having ugly things said about them and their families with politics used to push them out of the church. As a pastor and a human being, I have had the same

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 132.

thing done to me, people saying my denominational affiliation as a United Methodist Christian means I do not believe in the divinity of Christ or other orthodox beliefs which I have held close to my being my entire life. We all sometimes are on the receiving end of these kinds of attacks, or other times we are participants in it, striking at the very soul of those we say we love.

The good news for us all is we have the Lord God who reminds us of how his light will be our guide and how God will not abandon us. The Lord God is faithful unto all those who cry out to God. And God will help us to face all things with the knowledge and encouragement of how God is with us.

One of my favorite practices to do in both highs and lows in life is much like our psalmist in going to a holy place and praying to the Lord. For me, sitting in an empty sanctuary can be the perfect place to both audibly and silently offer pleas to God. Sometimes, as I pray for direction in my life, the plights and pains of my congregations, and the struggles my fellow clergy face, I look at the windows with light flowing in. I breathe in and out, and remember the verse from Psalm 27, “The Lord is my light and my salvation; should I fear anyone?” I am reminded of how no one is truly alone for the Lord God is with us and the Lord God is with me. The light of the Lord will guide us, and we will forever belong to the one who is the giver of life.

When is a time you felt frightened or alone? How did you feel the Lord responded to you in your fear? Where are places you feel you can freely speak to God? What spiritual disciplines do you use when you are afraid, and you desire to feel God’s presence? What allusions (like a light, a rock, etc.) remind you of the Lord and help you face all situations in your life?

Rev. Dr. E. Hunter Pugh  
Pastor of Brantley – Brunson Chapel Charge  
PO Box 71  
Brantley, AL 36009