

Fear and Joy
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United Church of Broomfield
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Psalm 27 (NRSV)

- ¹The 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?
- ²When evildoers assail me
to devour my flesh—
my adversaries and foes—
they shall stumble and fall.
- ³Though an army encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;
though war rise up against me,
yet I will be confident.
- ⁴One thing I asked 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.
- ⁵For he will hide me in his shelter
in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
he will set me high on a rock.
- ⁶Now 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.
- ⁷Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud,
be gracious to me and answer me!
- ⁸“Come,” my heart says, “seek his face!”
Your face, Lord, do I seek.
- ⁹Do not hide your face from me.
Do not turn your servant away in anger,
you who have been my help.
Do not cast me off, do not forsake me,
O God of my salvation!
- ¹⁰If my father and mother forsake me,
the Lord will take me up.
- ¹¹Teach me your way, O Lord,
and lead me on a level path
because of my enemies.

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¹² Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries,
for false witnesses have risen against me,
and they are breathing out violence.

¹³ I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord
in the land of the living.

¹⁴ Wait for the Lord;
be strong, and let your heart take courage;
wait for the Lord!

The Psalms are a collection of poems, prayers and songs that provide encouraging lyrics, as well as words of anguish and lament. A few are readily known by many, such as a 23rd Psalm, and they're often used as *supportive* scripture – they “pack a punch” when someone really wants to get a spiritual emotion across or when preachers want to include a “little extra” to the scripture selection for their primary message. Rarely, do preachers select a Psalm to be their primary text for a Sunday message.

When I work on my sermons, I review books, websites, and commentaries by a myriad of preachers and theologians, both modern and ancient. I've noticed that it is in fact true that when preachers give sermons, they don't regularly use a Psalm as their primary text. Many preachers readily admit that they purposely don't go the Psalms because, alone, they can be just too difficult to preach. Again, the Psalms are often seen as an add-on; a little seasoning added to the entrée, but never something to be feasted on by itself.

I can understand this position, but I don't like the idea of avoiding the Psalms as a primary text because sometimes...they just fit. Yes, some Psalms can come across as extreme, intense, or emotional, but the fact is that sometimes **that's exactly what is needed**, because that's what fits the moment.

A couple of weeks ago when I preached on the transfiguration and seeking the face of God, I referred to today's Psalm, which happens to be a part of today's prescribed lectionary readings, so I took that as a sign that I should focus on the Psalm again – make it my primary text.

Psalm 27 is a Psalm of David. There are debates whether *all* of Psalm 27 is actually one complete Psalm or two, namely verses 1-6 and then 7-14, written at different times by different authors. The reason this is believed is because of how different the two parts seem to be. Verses 1-6 are “a powerful song which expresses unshakable trust in God,” while verses 7-14 “[represent] the prayer of lamentation of a man who is in need of help in his great distress...”¹ Together, the Psalm seems to speak of a schizophrenic or bi-polar individual who begins declaring a confident and fearless trust in God which enables them to face the future calmly and undauntedly in spite of many perils; but then the author drastically does a 180 and clings to God in prayer. The latter verses speak of one oppressed by enemies, forsaken by their next of kin and suffering from a feeling of guilt which presses heavily upon their heart – they are consumed by fear and internally debating whether God *can or will* protect them.

Where scholars, both ancient and modern, debate and question whether the author of Psalm 27 is one person or two, I readily accept and can easily see it as one. We are that complex and it's how God made us. As children of God, seeking guidance and support from our God in a world of unpredictability mixed with joy and foreboding, does it really matter how Psalm 27 was constructed or how it came to be from our perspectives? To scholars maybe, but us regular, everyday folks, no.

¹ Weiser, Artur. The Psalms. The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, PA., 1962. Pg. 245

All of Psalm 27's verses, collectively in one thought (or more), speak accurately to our lives, right here, right now with its extreme emotions and scattered thoughts.

The Lord is our light in times of darkness, giving us hope.

The Lord is our salvation, especially when we understand that salvation isn't about getting to heaven, but rather experiencing life as God intends it for all of creation.

Of whom shall I be afraid? Well...we all want to be confident all of the time and say, "No One," because I trust in the Lord, but the reality is, despite believing in the Lord, I still experience fear.

Watching the news has been very difficult this last week. When I see what is going on in America and around the world it seems like there is so much suffering and fear, so much oppression, people – Christians - doing so many things that are antithetical to all that God wants for us and against everything that Jesus taught. It makes me afraid and sad. It makes me struggle to be confident and trust in the Lord.

The "don't say gay bill" passed this week in Florida, criminalizing **dialogues** in schools related to LGBTQIA persons and families. Georgia is readying to duplicate that bill. Texas's Governor enacted a law that criminalizes parents who **support and love** their trans children – and the first investigations by CPS have begun.² Idaho is readying to copy this legislation.

This week, we recognize the 2-year anniversary of our COVID shut down. Yes, it was on March 8th of 2020 that we went virtual because of COVID

² <https://www.bu.edu/articles/2022/latest-texas-anti-transgender-directive-explained/>

and while the situation with COVID is improving, it's not over and trying to return to normal has been a relief, but also fearful and anxious.

The war in Ukraine dominates the news every day. Here in America, it is worsening economic uncertainties with inflation, higher gas prices and more shortages in resources and supplies. And the possibility of a world war, a nuclear war, looms upon us creating a lot of fear. And then we see the pictures and videos coming out of Ukraine; the destruction, the deaths, and the carnage – it is horrific and saddening.

It's easy to be anxious and fearful with these events happening around us, but can we be joyful and faithful?

As I was reading and watching events in Ukrainian this week, feeling overwhelmed by the images, struggling to think about what I can do to be of any help, and praying for peace, I saw moments of joy and hope.

I saw a video that reminded me of the love, joy and beauty of God standing confident in the midst of fearful times.

As Ukrainians huddled together in a dimly lit bomb shelter in Kyiv, seeking safety from deadly explosions and chaos overhead, one young girl wearing a sweater decorated with silver stars began to sing. She was scared at first, worried that her voice would not be heard over the commotion inside the crowded bunker. But the sound of her singing "Let It Go" from the Disney movie "Frozen" pierced the uncertainty and fear, drowning out the sound of babies crying and adults chatting.³

³ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/03/08/ukraine-girl-frozen-let-go-idina-menzel/>

In Ukrainian, she sang the words, “I’m not afraid of anything anymore,” and everyone around her became silent, pulled out their smart phones and began to film and listen. She then transitioned into Russian, directly addressing the Russian people. You can see people tear up as they listen to that little girl fearlessly sing of not being afraid. It was later reported that that little girl, Amelia, and her family arrived safely in Poland.

As verse 6 declares, “I will sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the lord.”

Then, I saw the disturbing photos of the maternity hospital that was bombed in Mariupol. Pregnant women, bloody and covered in rubble dust, being rolled out on stretchers, or carried out of the wreckage as carefully as possible. One particular woman, 9 months pregnant, walking down a bomb-ravaged flight of stairs. How can anyone do this to humans, especially pregnant women and newborn babies? How can we let anyone do this? What will happen to these women and babies?

That woman walking down the stairs was reported to have given birth on Friday, two days after the bombing. She successfully delivered and she and her husband very purposefully named the little girl, Veronika, because it means “she who brings victory.”⁴ There are reports of countless other women giving birth in bomb shelters and underground depots in the last two weeks. One woman commented on these miracle babies saying, “their” birth is hope in this dismal time.⁵

Hope is emerging from suffering. It is the reassurance that undergirds this Lenten season.

⁴ <https://nypost.com/2022/03/11/pregnant-ukrainian-blogger-seen-fleeing-maternity-hospital-blast-has-given-birth/>

⁵ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10553735/Woman-23-gives-birth-daughter-shelters-bombs-Kyiv.html>

Victory; It is the promise of Easter.

The Psalmist, paradoxical and human, fearful and yet confident, declares, “I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.”

This is the gospel message we glean from Psalm 27.

We can experience fear, we can struggle and feel anxious as we witness adversaries, foes and oppressors both near and far. And we can feel joy, heeding the direction we are given in the final verse, “be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord.”

Grounded in trust, this waiting activates and energizes the courage to move toward the life that God intends.... Trusting God, we need not fear – for the Lord will teach us Her ways and lead us on a level path. And the good news is that along the way, despite the anxiety and fears of this world, we shall certainly experience joys for that is the message of our Lenten journey.

AMEN