

My Heart Shall Not Fear  
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First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha  
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**Psalm 27**

<sup>1</sup> 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?

<sup>2</sup> When evildoers assail me  
to devour my flesh—  
my adversaries and foes—  
they shall stumble and fall.

<sup>3</sup> Though an army encamp against me,  
my heart shall not fear;  
though war rise up against me,  
yet I will be confident.

<sup>4</sup> One 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.

<sup>5</sup> For 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.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud,  
be gracious to me and answer me!

<sup>8</sup> ‘Come,’ my heart says, ‘seek his face!’  
Your face, Lord, do I seek.

<sup>9</sup> Do 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!

<sup>10</sup> If my father and mother forsake me,  
the Lord will take me up.

<sup>11</sup> Teach me your way, O Lord,  
and lead me on a level path  
because of my enemies.

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

<sup>13</sup> I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord  
in the land of the living.

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

### **Luke 13:31-35**

31 At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, ‘Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.’ <sup>32</sup>He said to them, ‘Go and tell that fox for me, “Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. <sup>33</sup>Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed away from Jerusalem.” <sup>34</sup>Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! <sup>35</sup>See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.”’

Last week, I spoke of humbly acknowledging where it was that we could be better as one way to prepare ourselves to receive the joy of Easter. Today, I say live boldly! If you chose to give something up or take something on this Lent to bring you closer to God, do not forget Jesus’ words: “And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting.”<sup>1</sup> The sacrifice we make from our comfortable human ways and goals is meant to remind us of the sacrifice Jesus made, and of the suffering he undertook. We read in Luke that he knew full well what awaited him – in Jerusalem he would be killed. Did he sulk or shrink back? No, indeed. In fact, he was feisty and active and bold, undeterred by the challenges facing him in the moment nor by the challenges he knew would come.

He was going “through one town and village after another, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem.”<sup>2</sup> When warned by the Pharisees to avoid Herod, who wanted to kill him, instead he says, “Go and tell that fox for me, ‘Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work.’” He boldly faces his fate, in all its discomfort,

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 6:16

<sup>2</sup> Luke 13:22

naming it, **and** continuing in the work set before him, without slowing down. Not what we would call conflict-avoidant, is he? This, this behavior, is what we can learn from and use as a model for our own Lenten, and daily, non-Lenten, challenges and trials.

Since you are sitting in church pews, I suspect you know what the answer will be to this question: from where does Jesus get his fortitude in the face of trials? In case we are uncertain, the psalmist, who we know informed Christ, answers: “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.” Jesus, like the psalmist, could aptly speak of evildoers assailing him to devour his flesh, of adversaries and foes, of an army encamped against him, of a war risen up against him, of false witnesses who have risen up and who are breathing out violence. And still we hear from the psalmist, and see in Jesus’ actions: Don’t give up! Dig in! “My heart shall not fear...I will be confident.” Whether your challenges are present or imminent, live boldly. Trust in the Lord. As the psalmist says, and Jesus exemplifies, “Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!”

Sometimes, we know, when things go wrong, they really go wrong. Sometimes when things are difficult, they’re really difficult. And sometimes, well, sometimes, we just can’t be Jesus in the face of our troubles. It is then that letting our hearts take courage seems hardest and yet it is when we could benefit from it the most. Oh, to be Jesus, to look in the face of danger, of threats to our comfort and to our way of life, and thumb our noses at them, boldly forging ahead because, well, we have work to do. We live in a society that reminds us that someone else has always got it worse than us in order to encourage us toward that work, but it has the effect of invalidating whatever we feel we are suffering, trivializing the pieces of our lives which *do* keep us from living boldly, which keep us from living fully, which distract us from the work we have to do. Here’s the thing – that kind of societal reminder and encouragement is garbage, rubbish.

Who has a scale for measuring your troubles against mine? Is there a gauge which can read how you perceive your trouble and add to it how much your trouble impacts your life, your view, your hope? It’s true that there are problems which don’t only diminish one’s quality of life but instead destroy one’s quality of life. That doesn’t mean your troubles are not valid troubles for you. Jesus didn’t only heal lepers, as if to say they had it worst, or the demon-possessed, or the hemorrhaging. Jesus healed wherever peoples’ ailments separated them from society, separated them from community. How that separation presented itself came in many shapes and sizes.

Last week I encouraged you to prepare for Lent by looking honestly at the ways in which you could be better, without dwelling on what you cannot change. In the book of prayers I showed the

children, I found another prayer I want to share, one which was found on the kitchen wall at St. Benedict's monastery.

I was regretting the past and fearing the future. Suddenly God was speaking, "My name is 'I am.'" I waited. God continued, "When you live in the past, with its mistakes and regrets, it is hard. I am not there. My name is not 'I was.' When you live in the future, with its problems and fears, it is hard. I am not there. My name is not 'I will be.' When you live in this moment, it is not hard. I am here. My name is 'I am.'"<sup>3</sup>

This week, I encourage you to permit your troubles to be troubles in their exact measure for you, no less and no more than anyone else's, just yours. Admit them. Acknowledge them. Honor them. There are entire books of the Bible setting this example. Your troubles are a part of your life just as the joys in your life are part of your life. After acknowledging and honor them, give them up to God, for holding onto them does not change them – it changes only you. Holding onto them holds you back from living boldly. Holding onto them keeps you from boldly proclaiming and claiming the work you have to do, even in the face of trials. Holding onto them steals your confidence and grows your fear. In giving them up to God, you receive something in return – you receive the gift which allows you to say, "Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident...I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living!" So may it be for you and for me.

Let us pray: Embolden us, O Lord, that we might name our troubles as we entrust them to you, we pray. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> Jim Palmer, editor. *The Pocket Book of Prayers* (Nashville: W. Publishing Group, 2005) p. 125