

PSALM 27:1-8

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? When the wicked advance against me to devour me, it is my enemies and my foes who will stumble and fall. Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then I will be confident. One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple. For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent and set me high upon a rock. Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me; at his sacred tent I will sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the LORD. Hear my voice when I call, Lord; be merciful to me and answer me. My heart says of you, “Seek his face!” Your face, Lord, I will seek.

MATTHEW 4:12-22 - When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee. Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali— to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: “Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles-- the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.” From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” At once they left their nets and followed him. Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, ²² and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT, FROM FEAR TO FAITH, FROM IGNORANCE TO UNDERSTANDING ARE ALL PART OF THE EBB AND FLOW EARTHLY AND SPIRITUAL LIFE.

A POEM THAT REFLECTS ON THESE AND OTHER STRANDS THAT MAKE UP THE FABRIC OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE OFFERS A BEAUTIFUL METAPHOR:

“ MY LIFE IS BUT A WEAVING BETWEEN MY GOD AND ME; I CANNOT CHOOSE THE COLORS HE WORKETH STEADILY.

SOMETIMES HE WEAVETH SORROW AND I IN FOOLISH PRIDE FORGET HE SEES THE UPPER, AND I THE UNDER SIDE.

NOT TILL THE LOOM IS SILENT AND THE SHUTTLES CEASE TO FLY, SHALL GOD UNROLL THE CANVAS AND EXPLAIN THE REASON WHY.

THE DARK THREADS ARE AS NEEDFUL IN THE WEAVER’S SKILLFUL HAND, AS THE THREADS OF GOLD AND SILVER IN THE PATTERN HE HAS PLANNED.

MY LIFE IS BUT A WEAVING BETWEEN MY GOD AND ME; I SEE THE SEAMS, THE TANGLES, BUT HE SEES PERFECTLY.

HE KNOWS, HE LOVES, HE CARES, NOTHING THIS TRUTH CAN DIM; HE GIVES HIS VERY BEST TO THOSE WHO CHOSE TO WALK WITH HIM.”

THE BIBLE TELLS US SOMETHING SIMILAR IF WE HAVE THE EARS TO HEAR IT.

FOR EXAMPLE: CONSIDER FEAR, IT IS PART OF THE INNER NATURE OF ALL LIVING CREATURES THAT HAVE A CONSCIOUSNESS OF BEING.

THIS MEANS FEAR IS PART OF OUR SURVIVAL INSTINCTS, WHICH IS A GOOD THING, AND IN THIS SENSE, IT IS A GIFT FROM GOD.

THE PROBLEM WITH FEAR-FOR PEOPLE IS THAT WE MAY ALSO BECOME AFRAID, THROUGH OUR IMAGINATION, OF THINGS THAT MIGHT OR MIGHT NOT HAPPEN.

SUCH FEARS ARE NOT THE SAME AS OUR INSTINCTUAL FEARS.

A MORE COMMON FEAR AMONG HUMAN BEINGS IS THE FEAR OF DARKNESS.

ON A PRACTICAL LEVEL IT REVOLVES AROUND A CONCERN WE MAY FALL OR BUMP INTO THINGS AND GET HURT.

IT IS ALSO TRUE THAT PEOPLE OFTEN IMAGINE ALL SORTS OF DANGERS LURKING IN THE DARKNESS, THAT ARE NOT AT ALL LIKELY TO HAPPEN.

IT MAY HELP, THEREFORE, TO REMEMBER THAT IN THE BOOK OF GENESIS, GOD'S FIRST ACT OF CREATION WAS TO BRING FORTH LIGHT.

TRULY, DARKNESS AND LIGHT WERE PART OF GOD'S PLAN FOR CREATION FROM THE BEGINNING. NIGHT AND DAY ARE NATURAL CYCLES FOR LIFE ON EARTH.

HOWEVER, THE WORDS OF DARKNESS AND LIGHT ARE ALSO USED IN THE BIBLE TO SYMBOLIZE THE CONTRASTING REALITY OF EVIL AND GOOD.

ON A SPIRITUAL LEVEL OUR LIVES OF DOUBT AND FEAR, SIN, AND HOPELESSNESS CAN BE COMPARED TO BEING TRAPPED IN A ROOM WITH NO LIGHT.

THEN SUDDENLY A SINGLE RAY OF LIGHT BREAKS INTO THE ROOM TO RESCUE US FROM THE DARKNESS. BUT WE MUST BE WILLING TO FOLLOW THE LIGHT, TRUSTING IT TO LEAD US OUT OF THE DARKNESS.

PSALM 27 IS A SONG THAT VOICES THIS KIND OF TRUST AND CALLS OTHERS TO FOLLOW THE PSALMIST'S EXAMPLE.

THE FEARS EXPRESSED ARE BOTH REAL IN THE SENSE OF THINGS THAT HAVE ALREADY HAPPENED, AS WELL AS THE FEAR OF WHAT MIGHT YET OCCUR.

AN ILLUSTRATION ABOUT THE POWER OF FEAR AND THE POWER OF CONFIDENCE IS FOUND IN THIS STORY.

THERE WAS A YOUNG BOY WHO HAD A FEAR OF STAIRS OF ANY KIND.

HE WAS ESPECIALLY AFRAID OF GOING DOWN THEM, BECAUSE HE WAS CERTAIN HE WOULD FALL.

THE BOY, HOWEVER WAS DETERMINED TO NOT BE FROZEN BY HIS FEAR EVERY TIME HE ENCOUNTERED A STAIRCASE.

HE BEGAN TO WORK THROUGH HIS FEAR BY STANDING AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS, AND REPEATING TO HIMSELF ENCOURAGING WORDS, THEN HE COULD WALK DOWN.

THE PSALMIST WAS DOING SOMETHING SIMILAR BY EXPRESSING HIS FEARS TO THE LORD, ALONG WITH HIS FAITH THAT GOD IS MORE POWERFUL THAN HIS FEARS.

THE MESSAGE OF THE PSALM IS TO TURN FROM THE FEARFUL DARKNESS TO THE LORD, WHO IS THE SOURCE OF LIGHT, SALVATION, AND STRENGTH.

THIS BRINGS US TO TODAY'S GOSPEL READING. IT SPEAKS ABOUT GOD'S LIGHT SHINING FOR THOSE WILLING TO SEE.

THE FIRST RAYS OF THAT GREAT DIVINE LIGHT SPREAD UPON THE HORIZON ANEW—ABOUT THIRTY YEARS AFTER JESUS' BIRTH.

ONE DAY, THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD BEGAN TO SHINE A LITTLE BRIGHTER AMONG GOD'S PEOPLE, AS JESUS WALKED AMONG THEM.

THIS HAPPENED THROUGH THE PUBLIC APPEARANCE OF THE PERSON, THE PROCLAMATION, AND THE MINISTRY OF JESUS.

IN HIM THE LIGHT OF GOD'S TRUTH AND GRACE, LOVE, AND RIGHTEOUSNESS BEGAN TO SHINE MORE FULLY AS JESUS JOURNEYED THROUGH GALILEE.

TODAY'S READING TELLS US ABOUT THE MOMENTOUS EVENT OF THE TRANSFERENCE OF MINISTRY FROM JOHN THE BAPTIST TO JESUS THE MESSIAH.

THE EVENT COULD BE DESCRIBED AS THE LESSER LIGHT OF THE LAW UNDER THE OLD COVENANT, BEING ABSORBED BY THE GREATER LIGHT OF GRACE.

THIS GRACE FROM GOD WAS REVEALED IN JESUS, GOD'S WORD MADE FLESH, WHO MADE THE NEW COVENANT IN HIS OWN BLOOD.

THIS COVENANT IS A PART OF THE NEW CREATION MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH OUR SAVIOR.

MATTHEW TELLS US ABOUT THIS: "WHEN JESUS HEARD THAT JOHN HAD BEEN PUT IN PRISON, HE WITHDREW TO GALILEE.

HE LEFT NAZARETH AND WENT AND LIVED IN CAPERNAUM...."

IT WAS THERE THAT JESUS BEGAN HIS MINISTRY IN FULL FORCE.

JESUS' INTRODUCTION OF HIMSELF, HIS CALL TO REPENT FOR THE KINGDOM IS AT HAND- IS HOW HE SUMMARIZED THE INTENTION OF HIS MINISTRY AND MISSION.

IN OTHER WORDS, HE CLAIMED HIS PURPOSE WOULD BE TO INVITE PEOPLE TO ENTER THE KINGDOM THAT HAD COME IN HIS PERSON.

HOWEVER, CHRIST'S FIRST PUBLIC SPEECH- "REPENT, FOR THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN HAS COME NEAR", WAS A LITTLE DIFFERENT FROM JOHN'S CALL TO REPENT.

THE WORD REPENT MEANS MUCH MORE THAN TO BE SORRY FOR OUR SIN, IT IMPLIES A CHANGE IN ATTITUDE AND ACTION.

IN OTHER WORDS, JESUS WAS CALLING PEOPLE TO CHANGE THEIR ATTITUDE AS MUCH AS THEIR BEHAVIOR.

INDEED, REPENTANCE IS ABOUT REALIZING YOU HAVE MADE A WRONG TURN IN LIFE AND GOING BACK IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION.

REV. PETER MARSHALL, WHO WAS A FAMOUS PREACHER IN HIS LIFE TIME, EXPLAINS REPENTANCE SAYING:

"IF YOU WERE WALKING DOWN THE STREET AND SOMEONE CAME UP AND TAPPED YOU ON THE SHOULDER... NATURALLY YOU WOULD TURN AROUND.

THIS IS WHAT JESUS WAS CALLING PEOPLE TO DO WHEN HE WALKED AMONG THEM, AND IT IS WHAT THE SAVIOR CONTINUES TO CALL US TO DO.

THIS CALL IS EVEN MORE INTENSE FOR THOSE AMONG US WHO SEEK TO DO MORE THAN SIMPLY ADMIRE JESUS.

IT IS THE INVITATION TO BE A COMMITTED FOLLOWER OF JESUS, AS WELL AS A DISCIPLE, WHO LEARNS FROM HIM.

REMEMBER, BEING A DISCIPLE OF JESUS MEANS MORE THAN HAVING JUST A CASUAL COMMITMENT TO HIM.

IT INVOLVES THE DISCIPLINE OF OBEDIENCE AND SINCERE REPENTANCE, AS WELL AS THE EFFORT OF CONTINUAL LEARNING.

SOMEONE ELSE EXPLAINED WHAT THIS MEANS FOR CHRISTIANS SAYING:

"OUR GOAL IN LIFE IS NOT TO GET GOD TO BLESS OUR DREAMS AND AMBITIONS, BUT TO FIND GOD'S PLAN FOR US AND LIVE OUR LIVES WITH HIM."

ANOTHER DESCRIPTION THAT IS BOTH MORE POETIC AND MORE MEANINGFUL SAYS:

"DISCIPLESHIP IS THE PROCESS OF BECOMING WHO JESUS WOULD BE IF HE WERE YOU."

THE QUESTION, WHO WOULD JESUS BE, IF HE WERE YOU? DRAWS US INTO HONEST SELF-REFLECTION.

THE QUESTION IS RELEVANT BECAUSE STRIVING TO BE MORE LIKE JESUS IS MEANT TO A BY-PRODUCT OF OUR SALVATION.

IT IS PART OF BECOMING THE NEW CREATION IN CHRIST WE ARE MEANT TO BE, BY THE WILL OF GOD AND THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

AND THE NEW CREATION WE BECOME IN CHRIST, REALLY MEANS TO --BECOME WHO WE WOULD HAVE BEEN HAD SIN NEVER ENTERED THE PICTURE.

ANOTHER PART OF THIS PROCESS OF DISCIPLESHIP IS LETTING GO OF, BY PLACING IN CHRIST'S HANDS, OUR FEARS AND HESITATIONS.

DOING THIS WILL HELP US MORE FAITHFULLY ANSWER HIS PERSONAL CALL TO EACH ONE OF US.

THE WORDS OF A MORE CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN SONG PUTS THE CALL OF JESUS TO US IN THIS WAY:

“WILL YOU COME AND FOLLOW ME, IF I BUT CALL YOUR NAME?

WILL YOU GO WHERE YOU DON'T KNOW AND NEVER BE THE SAME?

WILL YOU LET MY LOVE BE SHOWN, WILL YOU LET MY NAME BE KNOWN, WILL YOU LET MY LIFE BE GROWN IN YOU AND YOU IN ME?

WILL YOU LEAVE YOURSELF BEHIND IF I BUT CALL YOUR NAME? WILL YOU CARE FOR CRUEL AND KIND AND NEVER BE THE SAME?

WILL YOU LET ME ANSWER PRAYER IN YOU AND YOU IN ME?

THOSE WORDS EXPRESS CHRIST'S CALL FOR BOTH INDIVIDUAL CHRISTIANS AND CHURCHES TO TRUST IN HIM TO LEAD US FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT, AGAIN AND AGAIN.

CHRIST'S INVITATION IS ALSO BOTH AN OPPORTUNITY AND A CHALLENGE TO LIVE AND GROW INTO WHO WE ARE MEANT TO BE.

TRULY, JESUS DESIRES FOR US TO LET HIS LIGHT NOT ONLY SHINE UPON US, BUT ALSO THROUGH US.

HE INDEED, FULFILLS THE HOPE AND POWER OF THE FAITH KING DAVID EXPRESSED IN PSALM 27.

AND JESUS DOES SO IN A MORE INTIMATE WAY THAN EVEN KING DAVID COULD HAVE IMAGINED.

CHRIST OUR SAVIOR TRULY IS OUR LIGHT AND OUR SALVATION.

AND THE HOLY SPIRIT IS ALSO SENT TO GIVE US GUIDANCE, COURAGE, AND STRENGTH, AS WELL AS CALM OUR FEARS, WHEN WE PUT OUR TRUST IN THE LORD.

IT IS FOR THE BLESSING OF THE LIGHT AND LIFE OF OUR SAVIOR WITHIN US, AND WE IN HIM THAT GIVE US A REASON TO PRAISE AND THANK THE LORD.

LET US PRAY:

ALMIGHTY AND GRACIOUS GOD, WE GIVE YOU OUR THANKS AND PRAISE FOR YOUR PERSISTENT LOVE TOWARDS US.

YOU CONTINUALLY CALLS US TO TURN BACK TO YOU, TO SEEK YOUR PRESENCE AND GUIDANCE AND TO FOLLOW JESUS THE LIGHT.

YOU SENT YOUR SON TO DISPEL THE FORMS OF DARKNESS THAT ARE NOT PART OF YOUR CREATION OR WILL, BY HIS TEACHING AND EXAMPLE, AND HIS DEATH ON THE CROSS.

SEND YOUR SPIRIT TO COMFORT AND GUIDE US ON OUR JOURNEY, AND TO OPEN OUR HEARTS AND MINDS UP THE WEAVING OF YOUR WILL FOR US.

GIVE US GRACE DAY-BY-DAY UNTIL YOU COMPLETE WITHIN US THE PROCESS OF CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP THAT BEARS THE FRUIT OF BECOMING OUR OWN UNIQUE REFLECTIONS OF YOUR SON, IN WHOSE NAME WE PRAY. AMEN

SERMON SUMMARY: PS 27 AND MATTHEW 4:12-25
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