

## **My Light and my Salvation**

### **Psalm 27**

Good Morning LMF Family,

It's good to be together this morning. I was away preaching at Warman Mennonite last Sunday and I missed you all! There was a part of me that was calculating if I could make it back here in time for coffee and visiting. Today is the last Sunday of the season of Epiphany, and next Sunday is the first Sunday of Lent. I had a short week in the office this week because of the family day holiday, so my words this morning will be more of a meditation on Psalm 27; and less of the fully formed sermon.

A few weeks ago, at fellowship time after the service, we were discussing current events; notably the freedom convoy in Ottawa. Someone commented that it seems lately that the world is just in a bad mood, there's so much angst and unsettledness. There seems to be a lot of anger, frustration and hostility happening around us. People are feeling unseen and unheard. On Tuesday, when I was trying to decide what to talk about this morning, the opening verse of our Psalm kept popping into my mind, "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?"

On Wednesday, Russia invaded Ukraine. Frankly, it seems these days as if there is a lot to be afraid of. If not for ourselves, then certainly for our neighbours around the globe. The Lord is my light and my salvation, who shall I fear? If this verse is true, is being afraid about a lack of faith? Is fear misplaced? Are the threats to the safety and security of this world small potatoes in the

eye of God? Whom shall I be afraid of?

Psalm 27 is often read as a Psalm meant to offer courage, confidence and sense of hope and security, and certainly the text could be read in that way, and serve that function, but what I think is most striking about this Psalm is its startling honesty. The Psalmist opens with this seemingly bolstering statement, “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?” From there the text lists a whole number of very good reasons to be afraid, “When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall. Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident.” This honesty from the Psalmist about the threats and violence that are around him is significant. “God, you know I trust you and I believe you, but it’s awfully scary out here sometimes. I don’t want to be afraid, but look at what I’m up against! Whom shall I fear? I fear this.”

Then, in verses 8-10 the Psalmist lays bare his relationship with God in midst of this turmoil, “Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud; be gracious to me and answer me! You have said, “Seek my face.” My heart says to you, “Your face, Lord, do I seek.” Hide not your face from me Turn not your servant away in anger, O you who have been my help. Cast me not off; forsake me not, O God of my salvation! For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the Lord will take me in.” Again, we see this incredible honesty from the Psalmist, “You can’t give up on me! I’m here and trying my best! Don’t leave me alone, even my own family can’t help me, Lord, you’re all I’ve got!”

The Psalmist is caught somewhere between faith and doubt, between absolute trust and absolute fear. And it’s precisely this tension, this both/and expression that allows this Psalm to speak to us in times like these. Let’s talk about why.

The Psalmist gives us permission to be honest about our reality and our own feelings and fears. This week, I listened to one of my favourite Podcasts, “Everything Happens with Kate Bowler” Seriously, her podcast is so insightful and moving. If you ever see me out on a walk around Langham and I’m WEEPING, just assume I’m listening to Everything Happens. In this particular episode, Kate Bowler interviews Kate Baer. Baer is a NY times bestselling poet, author of the poetry books, “What Kind of Woman” and “I hope this finds you well.”

In the intro to the interview, Bowler describes Baer this way, “ So what about when things aren’t going as swimmingly as we might have hoped? Might we speak honestly? Could we tell the truth, even if it’s negative? This is Everything Happens and I’m Kate Bowler. There are some people who act like human truth serum when they say the true thing, it makes everyone else follow suit. My kid is having issues at school and I’m worried he’s falling behind. Same, same same. My aging mom lives alone and I don’t want to take away her independence, I don’t know what to do. Same, same, same. Oh, your marriage is struggling? Same. I’m worried, I’ve missed the opportunity, or the relationship, or the chance to apologise. Same. Sometimes people help you echo back the truth with a clear and resounding same.”

This is exactly one of the purposes that Psalm 27 can serve in our own faith lives. “God, you know I trust you and I believe you, but it’s awfully scary out here sometimes. I don’t want to be afraid, but look at what I’m up against! Whom shall I fear? I fear this.” “Same.” “You can’t give up on me! I’m here and trying my best! Don’t leave me alone, even my own family can’t help me, Lord, you’re all I’ve got!” “Same” “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?” “Same.” I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living! Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord! Same.

It’s been my experience that when someone speaks out something real and honest to a group

of people; it frees up others to do the same. So, can we speak about our reality, our faith, our doubt, to one another in real and honest ways? Can we receive those real, honest words from one another with tenderness and gentleness?

Further, this Psalm invites us to embrace the tension of the human experience and the faith experience. The Psalmist's own vacillation between confidence and doubt, fear and peace, wonderment and despair give us permission to feel two things at the same time. To recognize the nuances that come with being a finite person following an infinite God. To be assured that all these feelings are bound up in our pursuit of Christ. We can trust that God is good and in control, and still, feel like the world is falling apart. We can believe that God will never abandon us, and still worry about being alone. Psalm 27 reminds us that God is not bothered by our honesty, and indeed, God holds all of those feelings in God's Hands. For that reason, the Lord is our light and our salvation.

To close my message this morning, I'd like to read a poem, written by Walter Brueggemann. It's called Salvation Oracles on Reading Isaiah 43:1-5, it's from Bruggemann's book Prayers of A Privileged People`There is a long list of threats around us:

terror,

cancer,

falling markets,

killing,

others unlike us in all their variety,

loneliness,

shame,

death--

the list goes on and we know it well.

And in the midst of threat of every kind,

you appear among us in your full power,

in your deep fidelity,

in your amazing compassion.

You speak among us the one word that could matter:

"Do not *fear*."

And we, in our several fearfulnesses, are jarred by your utterance.

On a good day, we know that your sovereign word is true.

So give us good days by your rule,

free enough to rejoice,

open enough to change,

trusting enough to move out of new obedience,

grace enough to be forgiven and then to forgive.

We live by your word. Speak it to us through the night,

that we may have many good days through your gift.