

The Peace We Forfeit

Psalm 27

A Meditation for the Drive In Communion Service

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¹ 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?

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

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

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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.

⁶ 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.

⁷ Hear, 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. ⁹ 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! ¹⁰ If my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will take me up.

¹¹ Teach me your way, O LORD, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies. 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!

It's unfortunate when they happens, because they stand out. I'm talking about printing errors. It's something all of us have experienced at some point in our lives. But, perhaps not on as grand as scale as some.

For example, at their first football game in 2013, Notre Dame distributed cups to fans emblazoned with *Notre Dame Fig-thing Irish*...instead of *Fighting Irish*.ⁱ Likewise, there was the famous newspaper article extolling the fact that literacy rates were improving in Mississippi...except Mississippi was spelled M-I-S-S-I-P-P-I. Even worse was the 2010 *Pasta Bible* published in Australia, which featured a cannibalistic recipe for a tagliatelle dish calling for salt and freshly ground people. And perhaps the worst printing mistake of all time occurred in a 1631 edition of the King James Bible. In this Bible, the word “not” was accidentally left out of the seventh commandment. Numerous editions were printed which stated, *Thou Shalt Commit Adultery*.ⁱⁱ

My memory of our scripture reading this morning from Psalm 27 is also shaped by a typo. Some of you remember that in the days before Power Point, we used to project words using a transparency – a piece of plastic film with the words printed on them. They were a great way to project lyrics to songs when you had large groups of people. One summer, years ago, our Vacation Bible School theme song was based on Psalm 27. Unfortunately, the transparency slide said:

*The Lord is my Light
And my salvation
The Lord is my Life
Obf whom shall I be afraid?*

It was a very minor typo – a “b” was accidentally added in the middle of the word “of.” But, the kids saw it and insisted on singing it as it was printed. And in the process, they drove this error deep into my brain. Now, every time I read Psalm 27, that’s how I read it – *The Lord is my life, obf whom shall I be afraid*.

Many of you are familiar with the opening words of the 27th Psalm:

*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?*

This Psalm, attributed to David, describes numerous issues that were shaking and discomfoting him personally:

- Evildoers assail me to devour my flesh (v. 2)
- An army encamps against me (v. 3)
- A war rises up against me (v. 3)
- My father and mother forsake me (v. 10)
- False witnesses have risen against me (v. 12)
- [These witnesses are] breathing out violence (v. 12)

Needless to say, David was being pressed from all sides. Some of you know the feeling. This week, you've been wrestling with decisions based on information that changes by the hour. You've been struggling to keep up with work demands, while taking care of the kids at home. You've been besieged by their requests to go and do things, but you know you shouldn't...even though an hour outside the home is just the respite you need. You've been grappling with the news that coronavirus cases have made their way here, and the numbers are likely to go up before they go down. And, some of you have experienced the ripple effects of COVID-19, which has led to cut hours or layoffs...or the fact that you have to cook at home now!

When evildoers were pressing in against him, his closest friends were forsaking him, and everything was going wrong, what did David do? He waited.

Verses 13 and 14 say:

*I believe that I shall see 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!*

The New Testament version of this text comes in Paul's letter to the Philippians.

There Paul writes:

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)

There are lots of things we can worry about. But, the way we are told to manage our fear of illness, or job loss, or financial uncertainty, or isolation, or empty shelves is to pray. To take your worries and fears to God in prayer. Instead of trying to manage these anxieties all on our own, we are told to let our requests be known to God. The old hymn, *What a Friend We Have in Jesus*, says this well:

*Oh, what peace we often forfeit,
Oh, what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
everything to God in prayer!*

The promise of Philippians 4:6 is that when we turn our anxieties into prayers, the gift that God gives us is the gift of peace, a peace that passes understanding, a peace that is bigger than the circumstances that we are facing.ⁱⁱⁱ Bigger than quarantines and COVID-19. Bigger than working remotely and cooped-up kids.

I've mentioned before that, if you pressed me to name a favorite hymn, I would probably tell you it's *God of the Ages, Whose Almighty Hand*. While this hymn, known as the National Hymn, is usually sung only around national holidays and observances, I found myself drawn to the third verse of this hymn this week. It begins:

From war's alarms, from deadly pestilence.

Deadly pestilence – look it up in the dictionary and you'd find that pestilence is a deadly or virulent epidemic disease. Sounds like the definition of COVID-19.

*From war's alarms, from deadly pestilence.
Be thy strong arm our ever sure defense.
Thy true religion in our hearts increase
Thy bounteous goodness, nourish us in peace.*

That's the kind of confidence David had. That's the kind of confidence Paul described. That's the kind of confidence we need. That's the kind of confidence that stands out. God is our ever sure defense – from worry, from anxiety, from deadly pestilence. And the assurance we have from Psalm 27 and from Philippians 4 is that, when we pray, God will nourish us in peace.

Here at First Christian, our mission asks us to *shepherd* [people] *to encounter the abundant peace of Christ*. Right now, toilet paper might not be abundant. Paper towels might not be abundant. Hand sanitizer might not be abundant. But the peace of Christ is abundant. It is there. And, all we have to do to tap into it is pray.

*Be strong
Let your heart take courage
Wait for the Lord!*

Let's pray.

ⁱ Zaldivar, Gabe. "Spell Checking Fails: Breaking Down Worst Typos in Sports" in *BleacherReport.com*. September 3, 2013. <https://syndication.bleacherreport.com/amp/1760385-spell-checking-fails-breaking-down-worst-typo-in-sports.amp.html>

ⁱⁱ Verona, Emily. "The Biggest Typos in the History of Literature" in *Bookbub*. March 4, 2020. <https://www.bookbub.com/blog/famous-spelling-mistakes>

ⁱⁱⁱ Skinner, Douglas B. "O What Peace We Often Forfeit." Facebook post, March 21, 2020, 4:27 am. <https://www.facebook.com/douglas.skinner.754>