

January 26 The Lord Is My Light

Psalm 27: 1-5

I want to begin by having you picture a time when the power went out, a time before we had nice LED lamps to power our houses when such occurrences happened. You groped in the darkness for a flashlight and then went and found your stash of candles to light. Once you had two or three lit, you had banished the darkness but it was not very bright. There were still lots of dark corners and shadows. The reason I bring this all up is that when you hear, “The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear?” we need to think of what light in the darkness meant in biblical times. Then, when it grew dark, they lit simple pottery lamps, with a single wick and flame. Only the wealthy would have used candles. This kind of lamp does not even give out as much light as a candle, it flickers with the slightest breath of wind, and the homes in those days did not have glass in the windows and the doors did not fit securely into frames with weather stripping all around to keep out the drafts. So light in the darkness was a small quivering flame that let lots of shadows still be present. Yet it banished the darkness. This is what the Psalmist had in mind when he would loudly proclaim the Lord is my light!

The people of the Bible feared the dark more than we but if we are honest we still fear the shadows of life. Think about the things we fear, crime and violence, the stranger amongst us, the person who looks different, or talks different than us. The antidote to fear—in our culture—is security, locks and guns. Think about how much we hear from politicians and others about security. But we need to hear that in the Bible, the fix for fear is God who is our light, who banishes the fear. When we hear this we think, that is a nice sentiment but it isn't realistic.

But this sentiment that says placing your trust in God banishes fear comes from a people who have known war and deportation. The psalmist talks about how an army encamps against him yet he will not fear. Instead of dwelling on all the worst that could happen he talks about how the one thing he is going to ask from God is that he can live in the house of the Lord all his life. Instead of seeing the shadows of what might be he instead wants to focus on the light of what is. No matter what, he believes that he will

see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. We need to be strong, take courage and wait for the Lord, our light.

Don't we all want this faith, this assurance? Don't we want, with God's help, to banish the fears that assail us? How do we do this? Again, we need to go back to the image of what was light for the people of that time. Remember that pottery lamp with a single wick and flame. When you had to go out into the dark you walked carefully, shielding that flame from the wind. It cast just enough light to see a short ways ahead. You were given enough light to take the next step with confidence but you did not know what was beyond that. You had to trust the light, know it would banish the darkness where you needed it most and ultimately you would get to where you needed to be.

This is the way it is with our lives. If we follow God's will, we do not know what the road will look like in a few miles or years. God gives us just a pottery lamp's worth of light, just enough to take a few more steps. You have to trust God when you have that kind of light. So today I want to talk a bit about how we walk in this light with trust, finding courage, seeing the goodness and defeating the fear.

The first is learning to trust that the Lord is our light and our salvation. When there are so many shadows around us it is hard to still the chatter of fear that assails us. We all wonder, "what if" or "Might be." These thoughts play upon us and when they get the upper hand lead to us being fearful. Fear of the unknown keeps us from trusting or causes us to lean on our own resources too much or causes us to give up in despair. None of these is what God would want.

It is hard to walk in the light of the moment. When you are waiting for test results that could change everything; who hasn't spent a wakeful night thinking about the "what ifs?" When someone in the family is going through a really challenging time we have spent anxious moments in worry about them. This is all a seemingly natural part of living. But the psalmist does share another vision. Focus on God and on God's light. This calms the fears. We are reminded that God gives us shelter in days of trouble.

When you think about it, much about what we worry never happens. Think about how many times you have had that sense of relief when the "worst case scenario" didn't

happen. If you are like me, that is most of the time. I realize I have spent way too much time fearing shadows that remain just that, shadows. And I have come to realize that worrying about them doesn't change anything, even if they do come about. I realize that God is with me in the good and sometimes bad patches of life. I will see the good triumph more often than the bad and so I strive to live in the moment, in the light trusting in God.

This isn't telling us to not make plans and be cautious and all the rest, we all need to do this. What it is saying is to not give into the fear but to trust that little flicker of a flame of light, it is all we are given, and walk in it faithfully. When we do this, the fear will subside and we will triumph over our enemies.

I see this happen so many times in my ministry. Let me share with you one story. We have a friend whose husband died last year. It was only three months from the time they detected the cancer until his passing. He had been a general contractor and still had a business and a barn full of tools. It has been incredibly difficult bringing his affairs to a close, ending the business, selling off his tools and such. He had been one of those who ran his business and didn't share much about it with her. She had her job and he his. It has been a year of surprises and frustrations. When we talked with her a few months after his death she was living this idea of trusting the light without even knowing it. What she talked to us about was how each day she got up and after prayer decided what she could tackle or needed to tackle that day. She then did her best to get that thing done. She talked about how she tried to focus on the moment and not get caught up in all the rest, I would say the shadows. She was refusing to give in to the "I wish I had known more about... or why would he do this?" She also refused to spend much time brooding about the future, how it would all work out or if it will work out. Instead she celebrated each day's accomplishments and how God was at work in her life. She would mention a reconciliation with a son, a friend with just the right knowledge stopping by to help and always her church and faith were central. She was at church every Sunday, with her small group study each week and as you heard started each day with prayer. To use the Psalm she was striving to live in the house of the Lord all her days and believed she would see the goodness of God each and every day.

It was June when we talked with her so I was interested to get her Christmas letter. What would it contain? In it were words of celebration. All those things that had been worrying her were now behind her. Business was closed, tools sold, finances in order and she was looking forward to good things to come, time with sons and grandchildren and through it all how her church and faith had seen her through this time. She didn't know how it was all going to turn out when we first visited with her. But she was willing to take that flickering lamp of faith and trust in God and walk out into the night and not fear the shadows and found God was her light and salvation.

“The Lord is my light; whom shall I fear?” We too often fear the future -- a future that often doesn't even happen as we dread. We need to remember that with God as our light, that small flicker banishes the darkness, we are not alone and in trust we will see the goodness of God today and every day even when a host of enemies encamp around us.