

## Psalm 27

### Triumphant Song of Confidence

<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!

## Matthew 5:43-48

### **Love for Enemies**

<sup>43</sup> “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ <sup>44</sup> But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup> so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. <sup>46</sup> For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? <sup>47</sup> And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, <sup>[a]</sup> what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? <sup>48</sup> Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

**January 22, 2017**

**Psalm 27: Matthew 5: 43-48**

**Prayer: Uncensored**

**Kerra Becker English**

Dear God, it's me Kerra. I'm back again. Another sermon to write this week, and not a whole lot of time to do it. So where are we going this time? What is it you want me to say to your people?

Psalm 27. It's the lectionary passage for this week. How about we start there? The Lord is my light and my salvation. That sounds like a good start. A "triumphant song of confidence" is what my Biblical heading says this week. And it makes me think of the song that we often sing at Richmond Hill for communion. Whom shall I fear? Whom shall I fear? The Lord is my light and my salvation. I've sang it now often enough to not have to look at the words. That's saying something for those of us who still open the hymnal for "Amazing Grace!"

But now I have to say something about what that means. Typical. As much as we want to think we can open the Bible and get its meaning, then we have to think about what a Lord does in our own context, and then figure out how that Lord is our light and our salvation. This is not your everyday vocabulary. Verse one, we've got a good song there, but it is already more confusing than it seems for the whole sermon writing thing. So what comes next? Maybe there will be a clarifying answer. Well, when I look at my handy dandy Presbyterian lectionary calendar, we are supposed to skip what's next. After we ask of whom shall I be afraid? Then we jump on over to verse 4 about that one thing we asked for, to live in the house of the Lord forever.

Now if I do that God, this astute congregation I serve might catch on. I'm not sure what lectionary wizard thought that nonsense up, but we might want a bit of an answer to those couple

of questions in verse 1. Whom shall I fear? Of whom should I be afraid? Those aren't just rhetorical questions; they're darn good questions. As comfortable as our lives can be in the Center of the Universe, we still have plenty of fears, thank you very much. God, I've had too many friends recently going through the fear of getting divorced, when the spouse they thought they knew turned out to be harboring anger, or boredom, or the ability to act out in ways that just don't seem right. That's a fear. What about the friends who are afraid that they're going to be losing health care coverage any day now? Some have been dependent on the Affordable Care Act. Some worry if employers will continue to cut back hours and jobs as providing benefits gets more expensive. That's a fear. When we fear the people that we thought we knew best or those who are supposed to have the "good of the people" in mind, our trust, even in you, can waver. When the diagnosis comes, when the elected officials keep acting out of their own interests, and when the reporters tell us what we want to hear rather than giving us the truth, I want someone else to blame. All these fears disturb my comfort, and leave me with a finger ready to point at or flip off some identified enemy. Our fear is real. First world problems are still problems, and yet, these aren't always the live or die situations that are going on around the world, and sometimes far closer than we would really like to think.

Yeah, what about those God? Of whom shall we *really* be afraid? If we look at those "secret" verses – verses 2 and 3 – we hear about evildoers, assailants, and enemy encampments. We actually need to know what to do about those things. Shortcutting this prayer doesn't do it any justice. This prayer, thank God, is about the real crap of life. Making it G-rated only makes people more suspicious of whether or not Christianity still has something to say to the challenges of modern life in January 2017. The evildoers, assailants, battle encampments and war haven't gone away. I want to sing a song of triumphant confidence! But sometimes the words get stuck

in my throat. I want the assurance of knowing that our enemies are in fact your enemies as well. But I'm reminded of Anne Lamott's wise words here, "You can safely assume you've created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do."

I get it God. I certainly don't want to be a bigot, but how can I keep from being a hater of the bigots and evildoers? I would also like you to smite my enemies, and hide me in your shelter on the day of trouble. How can I do that when I know in my heart that I've had my own bad days? It seems to me that there's a little bit of gloating going on in this prayer too. I imagine this guy, high upon a rock, jeering down at his enemies, going "Na, nana, boo boo." And it actually sounds a bit refreshing.

**Kerra, hold on a minute. Love your enemies.**

Jesus, where did that come from? Oh right. Jesus is where it came from. But what if I don't want to love my enemies? What if my throat tightens up every time I try to pray for my persecutors? That's the reason he said it, isn't it? It's easy to pray for our friends, our loved ones, and our beloved cats and dogs. And Jesus tells us there's no reward in it. Shames us really. Even tax collectors can do that. It's a reasonable reminder to note that the rain falls on the just and the unjust. Bad things happen to good people; and even more infuriatingly perhaps good things happen to some really bad people.

So God, So Jesus... get me through this one. Like I said, at some point I've got a sermon to get to here. Chop chop. What am I supposed to say? Life is hard. Enemies happen. Be good anyway. The Lord is my light and my salvation. Don't be afraid. Or, be afraid, live life anyway. It all seems so rehearsed, so scripted, so very exasperating. It seems like we've had a long history of skipping the hard parts, of cleansing the gospel, and censoring our prayers to make it sound like

we're good, nice people. When the truth of the matter is this, there are enemies out there that we'd like to be laughing at from the top of a high cliff because they've fallen all the way down to the bottom.

Teach me your way, O Lord. Lead me on a level path because of my enemies.

Don't give me up to the will of my adversaries – some of them are breathing out violence.

Now that's a powerful phrase. Breathing out violence. I'm afraid that I feel some of that hot breath on my neck, getting closer every day.

God, I want to be strong... courageous... someone with the patience to wait on the goodness of the Lord. I want to be able to explain to my people how important it is to take down the filters when we pray. Jesus loved his enemies, but it didn't keep him from sweating blood when he prayed. That's a truth that feels real to me.