

Praying Psalm 27 in light of Russia's invasion of Ukraine

Psalm 27 makes a wild claim, *The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear?* There's a good bit of fear today, for good reason. So what to do with this Psalm: God is light, so fear not?

In biblical times there were two kinds of light: the sun and the oil lamp. The sun we know gives light, warmth, life. Many plants depend on sunrays for growth. If we put flowering plants near windows, they turn toward the light. Takes time, but they turn.

God's first act of creation was God's calling forth light. (Gen1:3) 1st John, chapter 1 says, *God is light, and in God there is no darkness.* Psalm 139 alters that, *Dark and light are both alike to thee, O God.* The sense is, God is present in both light and dark. Even so, when we're alone in the dark even big people can be afraid.

Unfortunately, we've come to think the best antidotes to fear are things like security systems, or weapons. One of the TV reports I saw recently showed artwork by Ukrainian children that they're putting in soldier's lunch kits to lift their spirits. Each drawing had a happy face on the sun, showing hope. But along the ground of each drew even larger vehicles armed with guns. The young man being interviewed choked back tears as he lamented the drawing of war machines to outsize the sun.

When darkness fell during biblical times, the only light they had was the little bit of light emanating from their oil lamp. I love the verse in Psalm 119: *Your Word is a lamp to my feet, a light to my path.* My mom's Confirmation verse. The light to the feet pictures little lamps.

Psalm 27's *The Lord is our light, and our salvation* is like that. Not a floodlight dictating and taking over, but light guiding us to love one another, to cultivate wisdom and use it. God operates more as an *in-sight* provider than as a blinding dominating floodlight.

Love and light, which God is, calls us to be attentive, to remember God's light is shining even when we can't see it. As Anne Frank said, *I believe in the sun even when it isn't shining.* But it's hard to be satisfied with oil lamps. We'd rather have floodlights – the bigger the better. But what we're given is the longstanding promises of Psalm 27 that light still beams upon our way. *The Lord is our light and salvation, whom shall we fear?*

Fear can get the better of us – especially with social media detailing wars before our eyes. I was grateful for the chance to gather on Thursday evening this Lent on Zoom for *Lectio Divina* – Reading the Word with the heart. Join us any Thursday in March at 7 p.m. I keep my large globe in view. To close our time, we think of whoever we most want to pray for, that wisdom will shine on them. With the globe in view, we lift our hands in blessing.

We ask a lot of things of God, of ourselves, of others. Psalm 27 suggests asking one thing. Vs. 4 *One thing I ask 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, to inquire in God's temple.* That sounds like three things, but they're actually differing angles of one thing: a living relationship with God: "To live in the house of God" – meaning connected and intimate.

“To behold the beauty of God” – humanity is created in God’s image for beauty.

“To inquire of God,” – to actively listen for God’s living Word to address us, to engage us.

I was blown away by another news report this week about Ukraine. It was a PBS News Hour interview with a Chaplain in the Catholic Orthodox Church. *He feels his calling is to help people hold onto their humanity during these dreadful days. He helps them still attend to beauty, gazing with them at sunrises and sunsets.*

The Psalmist prays as Psalm 27 nears its end, *Hide not your face from me, O God.* Seeing God’s face is the one thing needful – on good days and difficult days. It’s the essence of what flowers teach – turning toward the light – beholding the beauty of the Lord of life.

We’ve been blessed to glimpse the face of God in Jesus who shows us God’s love most profoundly at the cross. The cross tells us this is where God meets us – in the midst of our suffering world – standing with those in need – inspiring us to stand with one another – even when the sun is shrouded, and skies are gray.

The truth is - clouds cannot stop the sun from shining. Neither can hate and fear drowned out love and goodness. Keep letting God’s light shine on you. It can’t help but shine through you onto others. It takes courage to pray Psalm 27 in solidarity with our hurting world. Psalm 27’s meaning is best heard in the plural. *The Lord is our light and our salvation, whom shall we fear?* Stay close to community in times of fear. Be living reminders that God holds us all. Amen

+Pastor Peg Schultz-Akerson, praying Psalm 27 holding my globe, imploring God’s mercies.