

March 13, 2022 Rev. Katheryn McGinnis

Let us pray,

Merciful God, help us to seek you and the message you intend for us in your Word read and proclaimed today. Amen.

Our scripture for today is the 27th Psalm. Listen now for the word of the lord.

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!

The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Psalm 27 is a breathtakingly beautiful Psalm that takes its readers on an authentic journey of faith.

The Psalmist moves from confidently praising God and God’s protection without fear, to doubt and pleading for God’s presence, to hope in the goodness of the lord.

It’s a confusing, chaotic journey: should not the journey of true faith start in doubt and fear and build to hope and then end confidently and without fear praising the Lord? Perhaps we think it should, but it doesn’t.

But therein lies its beauty: for if we reflect honestly and vulnerably on our own lives of faith - ours too, are not a straight path from doubt to confident faith.

We are like Psalm 27, throughout the highs and lows of our lives we sing God's praises one moment and plead for God's presence to be made known the next.

We live in faith and in fear and in faith again. We feel this now. With the state of the world, do we have faith in God's steadfast love - or are we afraid and pleading for God's presence to be made known?

We want to have faith, but perhaps doubt is creeping in as the invasion in Ukraine continues and more and more innocent die.

Psalm 27 gives us space to hold both: fear and faith, trust and doubt. Better yet - Psalm 27 demands that we hold faith in one hand in doubt in the other - because real fear lives alongside honest faith - in this psalm, as in life, both are unavoidable.

But, as Lindsay Armstrong writes, perhaps unexpectedly, both are also essential. "Vigorous faith and animated doubt both insist that we take God seriously, ask God real questions, and depend upon God in tangle ways. Examined doubts refine our understanding and illuminate our experience of God as we filter our beliefs, sifting wishful thinking about the God we want from the challenging wisdom of who God is." For, like in verse 1 - we want the Lord to be our light.

In ancient times there were two kinds light: the sun and the lamp. The sun is brilliant and full of wonder and mystery and gives life and warmth to our world. But a lamp was just a simple wick and flame. Just enough light to see a few steps ahead.

We want God to be our sun, yet the reality is the journey of faith is lit by a lamp - we only know a few steps ahead - we must have faith God is with us on the journey. The struggle between faith and doubt is a struggle as old as time itself.

One famous story of faith and doubt is in greek mythology: the story of Orpheus and Eurydice.

Orpheus was the son of the God Apollo and a brilliant musician. He met and fell in love with a woman named Eurydice. They got married and were happy - until one day Eurydice was bitten by a snake and died.

Thus Hades, king of the underworld, comes and takes her to her new place amongst the dead. Orpheus was heartbroken and turned to his music in grief. So powerful was his melody that everyone, even the Gods, felt his pain.

Orpheus thus decides to go down to the underworld to save Eurydice and bring her back to the land of the living. Under the God's protection, he journeys to the underworld and woos Hades with his music until Hades agrees to let Eurydice go back with Orpheus: there is just one catch - while walking out of the caves of the

underworld back to the land of the living, Eurydice must walk behind Orpheus and he cannot look back to see her until they reach the light.

The journey is a long one - and he starts with patience and steadfast faith that Eurydice is right there with him. But as the journey goes on and on - he begins to doubt. He can no longer hear her footsteps and he fears she is not there. And just as he sees the light, just as he is almost there, doubt overcomes him and he loses his faith.

He turns around only to see Hades taking Eurydice away forever. She was with him the whole time - he needed only to have faith. It ends in tragedy, the long walk of faith and doubt that Orpheus and Eurydice took.

It is a sad story. Yet it is a story that has stood the test of time and captured the hearts and imagination of people from all walks of life for thousands of years - being made into books and songs and plays and movies.

Why?

One of the most recent retellings of the story of Orpheus and Eurydice is the current Broadway musical *Hadestown*. In the musical, when Orpheus and Eurydice begin the walk out of the underworld, they sing a rather appropriately named song - doubt comes in... and at the end of the song - as doubt comes in - Orpheus turns and sees Eurydice and the song stops... and then it goes silent as Orpheus loses Eurydice forever.

And then the narrator begins to slowly sing to the audience. He tells us it's a sad song, it's a sad tale, it's a tragedy. But we sing it anyway, he tells us, 'cause here's the thing... To know how it ends ... And still begin to sing it again ... As if it might turn out this time. I learned that from a friend of mine. See, Orpheus, he could make you see how the world could be, in spite of the way that it is.

It's a story that stands the test of time, because just like Psalm 27 - we all are walking the long journey out of the cave holding both faith and doubt.

Yet, we tell the story time and time again - because in the tension of faith and doubt - if we are bold enough to hold them both without fear - we start to see how the world could be. In spite of the way that it is.

God's kingdom brought here on earth - in spite of the ways our world falls to sin.

The season of Lent invites us on a journey into the wilderness. And on that journey we must take both faith and doubt.

For faith is not simply about believing or not believing - it is about the truth of what we have known. Our lives lived. And the truth is, in our lives we have known joy

and pain, love and sorrow. And not in a straight line, but a cyclical journey that often feels like chaos and confusion.

But if we have the courage to walk that journey with faith and doubt - the journey with only a lamp to guide us out of the cave - we perhaps can come to see the details in the steps in front of us - details we might perhaps miss in the overwhelming light of the sun.

Details we might miss doubting whether God is behind us. Beauty in the tiny moments we push aside in search of grand light.

For it's in those details, lit only by a flame - that we can perhaps finally let go of the God we want, and instead accept God who God is - the God whose glory is not revealed in the sun at the end of the journey - but in the darkness of the cave. In the darkness of death. But in whose resurrection gives hope here and now for what the world can be - the already and the not yet.

It's not an easy thing to do - to hold faith and doubt together. Orpheus fails, succumbs to doubt and not faith.

But Psalm 27 ends with a charge to wait for the lord. - be strong, let your heart take courage, and wait for the Lord. We have time to fail and then learn again.

It takes time and patience.

Lent is a time to try - to learn spiritual practices and skills we need to navigate pain, learn lessons, gain perspective, and perhaps even experience the world differently.

To keep discovering God again and again in both the joy of the world and in its pain and suffering.

We must keep discovering God even now. Especially now.

For it is God's call upon our lives - to see what the world could be, in spite of the way that it is.

Thanks be to God. Amen.