

Song of Confidence

Psalm 27:1, 4-9

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?

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!

What are the things that you tell yourself when you are in a place of fear? Do you sing songs about how afraid you are? Or are your songs ones to encourage yourself and ones of confidence? I binge-watched a cooking show last week. They started out with 12 contestants who were in competition to win \$100,000 based on their desert making skills. Several of the contestants beat themselves because of the songs they sang to themselves. Contestants always survived longer in the competition when their songs were ones of confidence. In the second series of shows the person who clearly had the better skills lost in the final contest because of the song she sang to herself.

Carmen Fernandez tells that when her nephew was a young child, escalators and stairs terrified him. His mother recalls his efforts to conquer his fears: standing at the top step with all the courage he could muster, he bolstered his resolve by repeating words of encouragement to himself over and over. With its opening mantra (v. 1) and its concluding verse (v. 14), Psalm 27 reminds her of the nephew's internal conversation to reassure himself and to inspire the confidence necessary to face the dreaded source of

his insecurity. While several biblical scholars find a tone of confidence running through the psalm, certain elements in the text give more of an impression of one trying to build self-confidence, convincing oneself on the basis of prior experience that in this time of trouble God will deliver.

This psalm combines trust in God with lament and concern in time of trial. Throughout the anxiety of the petitioner is profound, as he faced evildoers, enemies, encamped armies, adversaries, and false witnesses. However, he also affirms his trust in divine deliverance; set side by side with mournful cries begging God not to "forsake" him in his time of endangerment (27:9). **Carmen Nanko-Fernandez**

We know what the author of Psalm 27 knows: troubles and trials abound. That things go badly is well established. That things *might* go badly is the wellspring of worry. From early morning to late evening, from the early years to the late evening of life, anxiety persists. A child worries about an upcoming move to a new school. A father fears the pending diagnosis of his adult son's illness. Pangs of anxiety seize a senior in the wake of their spouse's death. The trouble we face today is compounded by the uncertainty of tomorrow.

In his book *The Joy of Worry*, the satirist Ellis Weiner offers an anecdote that may be recognizable to many of us. He writes:

A young woman of high-school age was out late one evening.... Her father fell into an untroubled slumber, but her mother sat up, fretting and brooding and imagining a variety of disasters that might have befallen their daughter. Finally the mother could stand it no longer. She looked down, punched her husband, and said, "Wake up. It's your turn to worry," at which point the man took over worrying and the woman went to sleep.

Weiner makes light of the anxiety parents bear, but his humor holds a kernel of truth. We are spared from neither the difficulties of life nor the capacity to worry about what may be.

Today's psalm paints a fearful scene. The details of the psalmist's difficulties remain hidden, but the author expresses good reason to worry. The landscape of the psalm is

populated with "evildoers" who aim to "devour my flesh" and "an army" that threatens the psalmist's life (vv. 2, 3). We hear in the psalmist's fourfold cry for help the seriousness of his straits (vv. 7-9). In the face of persecution, the psalmist offers a song of praise and a bold statement of faith. He confidently declares that God "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" (v. 5). This expression of hope casts light on the tension between fear and faith.

In the light of this psalm, faith's opponent is not doubt. The psalmist does not question the presence or goodness of God. Rather, the psalmist helps us see that fear is the foe of faith. Great are the troubles and trials that loom over the psalmist, but his faith in God equips him with strength to endure "the day of trouble" (v. 5).

We find evidence of such faith-born strength all around us in the lives of members of our congregation. I know how you have kept the faith during the difficult times! The story is told of a young mother of a newly dedicated infant who visits her pastor. She tells the pastor about the worries she bore during a complicated pregnancy. She speaks of the anxiety she felt during her daughter's earliest days. Then with wet eyes, she recounts the words she heard during the rite of dedication, how nothing could separate her daughter from God. She searches for words of adequate praise to describe her newfound confidence in God's care. The mother's trust echoes the psalmist's assurance that the goodness of God is greater than the sum of life's trials.

At a funeral service, a ten-year-old granddaughter of the departed stood in the chancel before family and friends. She sang Robert Lowry's "My Life Flows On in Endless Song":

My life flows on in endless song; above earth's lamentation,
I hear the sweet, though far-off hymn that hails a new creation.
Through all the tumult and the strife, I hear the music ringing;
It finds an echo in my soul—how can I keep from singing?

Life is difficult, especially in the midst of heartrending loss, but the gathering of mourners was strengthened that day. The young girl's courage to sing, like the hymn itself, reflects the message of Psalm 27. Amid life's greatest challenges and in the dimly lit face of an unknowable future, we find voice to "sing and make melody to the LORD" because God can be trusted (v. 6).

To hear and meditate on Psalm 27 is to remember not only a mother's glimpse of God's abiding presence or a girl's song of faith at a funeral service. This psalm is also to keep in the mind of each of us who strain to hear the good news of that "far-off hymn" and this psalm. We worship together and sit as faithful souls who do fear the incoming waves of tumult. Anxious questions choke our statements of faith. Will my cancer return? What if I lose my job, my health insurance? Will my boy return home safely and unharmed physically and mentally from military service?

As these and other questions collide with the psalmist's confidence, we proclaim the trustworthiness of God on behalf of those who are burdened with the uncertainties of life. The psalmist's faith is offered as assurance that God is with us—yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Years ago a beloved, longtime church member was wracked with worry about his son. Sunday after Sunday the man returned to the sanctuary. When the congregation sang its hymns, he stood without a hymnal. He listened to the familiar tunes, but he had lost his voice for singing. The congregation's alleluias felt far off.

One Sunday he rose during the time of congregational prayer. He offered a prayer of thanksgiving for the people in those pews. He thanked his fellow churchgoers for keeping the faith when he could not, for singing hymns when he could not, for seeing the goodness of God when his eyes were too cloudy to see it. To be sure, his concern for his son continued, but he had begun to recognize again the source of his strength. His words were his own, but they echoed an ancient faith: *God is my light and my salvation. God is the stronghold of my life. I will sing to the Lord.* **Andrew Nagy-Benson**

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Fears of life will come, but let us continue to sing our songs of faith, our songs of confidence in our God!

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