

Wait for the LORD
Psalm 27

**First Presbyterian Church
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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?

These opening sentences of Psalm 27 are bold declarations. Statements made right into the teeth of terrors and enemies. Statements made from the midst of accusations and trials. The world looks one way: dark, destructive, frightening, without refuge or hope. I declare something truer than the way the world appears: The LORD is my light in the darkness. The LORD is my salvation amidst destruction. The LORD is my refuge and anchor amidst very real anxieties.

These assertions cause me to ask my soul some strong questions. If indeed the LORD is light, then whom shall I fear in the dark? No one, for no one can quench God's light. If the LORD will shine in the blackest night why should I be afraid because I cannot see the way? God will make a way. Since the LORD is my strong tower, why do I fear the assaults of others? He will keep me safe.

Just speaking these sentences awakes courage. Just saying the words stills our hearts. The LORD is my light and my salvation. The LORD is the stronghold of my life. Yes, we really want to have this first verse tattooed on our minds and inscribed in our hearts.

As we work through parts of Psalm 27 this morning, let's take a moment to become aware of the identity of this God who is light and salvation and strength. He is the LORD. Now every Sunday, I invite you to declare your faith at the end of each service. That is a very intentional act of worship. We close the service with the congregation saying, "Blessed be the LORD I Am, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit." I ask you to bless God. To bless means to praise. To praise means to say, "I believe this about you. I rejoice in who you are." If you mean it, this actually is a saving profession of faith. I put my trust in God even as I bless him. There is no Sunday when people do not have a chance to declare their ultimate allegiance. We walk out of worship knowing, "I have thrown in my lot with the God we have worshipped. I go out bearing his name. He has claimed me, saved me, and sent me to serve him."

But we do not mean just any God. We don't mean God as we want to conceive him to be. We mean, with Psalm 27, a very specific God who has revealed himself in a particular way in history, in the world of dust and swiftly passing time where we all make our way. David prays, "The LORD is my light and my salvation." If you look closely at your Bible, you will see that the word "LORD" is in all capital letters. That means we're not talking about any old "lord," as if God were a member of the British royalty. When you see "LORD" written in all capital letters, you know that this is the English translation of four Hebrew letters, YHWH. These letters, the YHWH, are the personal name of the God who revealed himself to Abraham, Jacob and Moses. This is the essential name of the God of Israel, the God of Jesus Christ and the Holy Scriptures.

No one really knows exactly how the name was supposed to be pronounced. And mostly they didn't try to pronounce the YHWH. It was too holy to speak. Because the Name meant the revelation of the very being of our God. So the ancient Hebrews, when they came across the YHWH, would say instead, "Adonai," which means "lord" in English. So that's why today Bible translators render the Hebrew letters of YHWH with the word "lord," but they do it in all capital letters to let us know that this is actually the sacred Name of God. So, LORD, in all caps, means the holy name of the one true God, Creator of heaven of earth.

Now the Hebrew letters YHWH can actually be translated to mean "I Am." It is a statement of pure being. I Am. It's me. The heart and soul of everything. Before the world was made, "I Am." After you are gone from this earth, "I Am." In the depths of space or the in the tiny spaces between electrons and neutrons, "I Am." You could also translate it as "I Am who I Am." Or "I will be who I will be." You get the idea. Ours is not the god of the river. Not the sun god. Not the divine feeling in the soul. Not the best guess of religious people. Our God *is*. Our God is the God of gods. The King of kings. True being. He is. He reigns. He rules.

Let me push us just a bit farther on this. Just so you can know how outrageous is the brief declaration you make every Sunday at the end of church. The Old Testament reveals to us that the one true God is the God who called a people to himself. He saved Israel from slavery. He led them to the Promised Land. He gave his people his Word. He created them to be a blessing to the world. The New Testament reveals more to us. Do you know how it is when you walk into a room at dusk, before you turn the light on? You can see that the furniture is there. You see the outlines of what's in the room, but it's shadowy. You don't really know what the room is like. But when you turn on the light, the fuzzy outlines

become clear. You see the colors. You see the paintings on the wall. You see each piece in clarity. The New Testament turns on the light about the LORD I Am. He is actually the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He is one God in three persons. He is a God whose very existence is one of relationship. He is love. From all eternity the Father and the Son and the Spirit have been engaged in a dance of love. From that love all things were made. In the fullness of time, the Father sent his Son to dwell among us as Jesus Christ. Through his life of love and obedience, Christ won our salvation. Now he sends the Holy Spirit to join us to himself so that we might be taken up into the very life of the Triune God. When we speak about the LORD, in all capital letters, we mean the one God in three persons, the Triune God of Grace. All of that is what we're saying when we say, "Blessed be the LORD I Am who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

What does this have to do with Psalm 27? Think of this psalm on the lips of Jesus. As a man, he prayed to his Father, "The LORD is my light and my salvation." When he did not know what was coming next. When he was attacked by the religious leaders or tempted by the evil one, Jesus would declare, "The LORD is my light and my salvation." He relied on his Father as the Son who was truly human. He prayed and taught and healed just as we do, in reliance on the power of the Holy Spirit who joins us to the Father. As the Son of God, Jesus would also say of himself, "I am the light of the world" (Jn. 8). As a man he affirmed that the LORD is his light. But as the eternal Son in flesh, he knew that he himself is the LORD I Am. I am the light of the world. Now take it one wilder step further. Jesus also said to those who are joined to him, "You are the light of the world." As we are joined to Jesus, we are taken up into the life and mission of the Triune God. The Holy Spirit resides within us, so we have his eternal light. We are called to let his light shine so others may see our God. We participate in the love and work of the LORD I Am.

Let's walk through a few more verses in this magnificent psalm. David prays, "One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple." David longs to dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of his life. Does he mean he wants to spend all his time just at church? Does he want to give up golf, business, football, gardening, dinners and even good hygiene just to be in the sanctuary all the time? We know he can't mean that. What's more, the great temple hadn't even been built yet.

"The house of the LORD" works on multiple levels. Paul tells us that each of us in Christ are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6: 12). To dwell in the

house of the LORD means to become aware of the presence of God already in our lives and living in our hearts. If we belong to Christ, the Spirit of God lives in us and we live within the life of the Triune God. But we are so often unaware of any of this. We tune out God's presence. We ignore the house mate in our homes, living separate lives under one roof. To dwell in the house of God, however, means to become aware again of the God who is there. The God who is near. It means relating to him. Listening to him speak through his Word and speaking to him about all he has undertaken to save us. We seek the LORD. This is an interior spiritual quest to seek the presence of the God already in our lives.

But of course we live in bodies in a real world. Where we are influences us. Ever tried to seek the presence of the LORD in your heart while doing stop and go on I-10 while late for an important meeting? It's not easy. By contrast, there are some woods I've been walking for years now. There is a place I go that is a cathedral of trees. Peace seeps into me as I walk there. I put my foot on the same stone I've been touching for years: the LORD is my rock. Morning sunlight makes the leaves shine bright as they reach for the sky. Those lifting branches inspire me to lift my hands in praise. Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In that place where God seems to catch me up into his heart, I have rejoiced, cried, pondered perplexing futures, offered up deep concerns for loved ones, given thanks for this great church, found solutions to thorny problems, and been renewed with the awareness of God's reality.

Maybe you have such places that you have known in various seasons of life. They are a great gift. But I can't get to those woods very often. And when life changes, we can be cut off from such holy spots. But maybe less dramatically, you have a place in your home where you go and meet God. Of course you can meet God anywhere. But there might be a chair, perhaps with a view out a window, a place where you meet God morning after morning. A place where you pick up a cup of coffee and a Bible, where day after day, in dry times and rich, in hard times and good, the LORD has shown up for you. We don't ever want to be too long away from that meeting place.

And of course David means the place where God's people gather for worship. Our relationship to the LORD is not just solitary. The God of love calls a people to himself. I know, you can meet God in a warehouse just as well as a sanctuary like ours. But to me, architecture matters. The design of a room can lift you up and increase your awareness of God, especially when surrounded by the symbols of God's reality. And even more, there is the power of continuity. When we meet week after week in the same place with the same people, singing God's

praises, hearing his Word and partaking of his sacred Supper, we get formed in God. The very room resonates with meaning. We perceive the God who is everywhere as especially present to us in his house with his people. Before you know it, you've been in worship several hundred Sundays. You've proclaimed the resurrection at a dozen funerals. You've rejoiced in a dozen marriages. You've seen a dozen babies baptized. You've had a thousand conversations. And you realize that your whole life is knit together by your time in the house of God, meeting him here, inquiring in his temple, dwelling in his presence.

Finally, the last two verses of our psalm have consistently meant a great deal to God's people,

I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living!
Wait for the LORD: be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!

Life can be hard. We are all passing away. Even mother and father can forsake us, for even the best parents must leave us in death. Loved ones get in trouble. Finances unravel. Health erodes. Enemies pursue us. People lie about us. Gossip about us. They seem to want us to fail and fall. The way ahead can seem inscrutable. We just don't know which path to take and worry what will happen if we choose the wrong one.

All these difficulties David has acknowledged. He prays to God about these problems. Shares his burden with his God. Then he ends with an affirmation. His prayers have changed him. His worship in the house of the LORD has helped him. He says, "I believe I shall see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living." This is going to get better. In this world, in this life, the road will clear. God will make a way. He is my light and salvation.

Until that time, I must speak to my heart: wait on the LORD. I know you want the pain to be lifted now. I know you want the way to be clear right away. I know you want the tension resolved immediately. It doesn't work that way, heart of mine. Pour out your concern to God. Trust him. Wait. His swift sure Hand will move. His invisible Hand will move in your life. If you wait in trust with eyes peeled, you will see it. The unseen God will have acted. Something will happen and you will know he is at work.

Wait for the LORD! Be strong, my heart. This will not last forever. Your God is not weak. Your God is not absent. He is the great LORD I Am who has undertaken to save you in Jesus Christ. He has sent his Spirit inside you. He is

faithful and he will do it. Take courage. Wait for the LORD. Wait for the light to shine. Wait, for though you seem adrift in the sea, there is solid ground underneath you. God is your rock. Wait, for though there may be enemies all about, the LORD is your stronghold. He will keep you. Seek him hour by hour. Seek him in your heart and among his people. Fear not. Be of good courage. The LORD is God. And you are his.