

Lyrics for His Life, Pt. 3
Because of My Enemies
Psalm 27: 1-6, 11-14

**First Presbyterian Church
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Isn't it weird when you discover that you have an enemy? There's a sickening realization. It can come in many forms. Wow, this person means me harm. I am the target of this person's anger. Or, this person wants what belongs to me. She is scheming to get it. Or, this person believes I am the source of his problem; he wants to take me out. He wants to see me fail. Or, this person believes I have done her wrong, and she wants revenge. She wants to punish me. This group thinks that my group is evil, extremist, threatening. They are bent on maligning and eliminating us. It's startling to encounter such hostility.

One of the most draining parts of having enemies is the mental and emotional space they occupy. The enemy causes you to question everything about your actions and motives. It's hard to get it off your mind when you discover that a group of people has been meeting secretly in order to plot how to undermine you. The scathing accusation in person or in a message plays over and over in your thoughts. Hyper-awareness exhausts us when we're worried what our nemesis will do next. The sense of being watched for any flaw or weakness unnerves. Fear chills us like a cold stripe in a summer lake. Thinking about the enemy consumes our days.

In Psalm 27, David cries out to the LORD, "Give me not up to the will of my adversaries; for false witnesses have risen against me, and they breathe out violence." He experiences enemies as those who want to devour him. "Evil doers assail me to eat up my flesh." Yes, they want to consume your flesh, your focus, your joy, your time, your whole life. Enemies are a problem.

Jesus knew something about this. Mark's Gospel is the shortest account of Jesus' ministry. Mark moves at break-neck speed. Already by the 2nd chapter we're introduced to the opposition Jesus faced almost as soon as he started his ministry. The religious leaders, the Bible scholars, the political leaders and even his own family all question Jesus. Imagine that you came to heal the sick, welcome the outcasts, teach people the truth about God and lead them to a life of love and flourishing. But you got opposed at every turn with charges of blasphemy, law-

breaking, insanity and demon possession. Let's take a look at the cascade of accusation Jesus faces.

- **Blasphemy.** Jesus speaks to the paralytic before he heals him, declaring “Son, your sins are forgiven.” The scribes are offended, “He is blaspheming. Who can forgive sins but God alone” (Mk. 2: 7).
- **Corrupt Company.** Jesus calls Levi the despised tax collector to come and follow him. Overjoyed with a new life, Levi throws a great banquet for Jesus. But the Pharisees said. “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners” (Mk. 2:16). Surely he's guilty by association. After all, bad company corrupts good morals.
- **Sabbath Breaking.** The Pharisees watch Jesus intently for any violations. They see him enter the synagogue and heal a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath. From that moment on they make an alliance with the political party of the Herodians so that together they can plot how to destroy Jesus (Mk. 3: 1-6).
- **Insanity.** As Jesus calls disciples, and continues teaching and healing, great crowds follow him. His family grows worried he's taken things too far. Jesus got so busy ministering he can't even eat. Mark tells us “they tried to seize him” and take him home. They said, “He is out of his mind” (Mk. 3: 21).
- **Demonic Possession.** Meanwhile, others charge that Jesus' healing power comes not from God his Father but from the evil one. “He is possessed,” they say. “He has an unclean spirit” (Mk. 3: 22,30).

That's a lot of opposition. It must have driven Jesus to prayer. He had to ground himself again and again in his calling. He'd have to question himself, “Am I really doing wrong? Am I speaking too boldly? Am I crazy?”

So, would Psalm 27 have been a help to Jesus as he dealt with constant enemies and the questions they raised? Jesus' distant ancestor King David faced enemies who wanted to topple the king. Would the focus of his prayer influence and strengthen Jesus? Let's look at three aspects of this prayer.

1) Steady Focus on the LORD. Enemies love to occupy all the space in our minds. They want us to be unnerved and worn out by worrying about them. They want us to think that our lives are about them. David knew enough to lift his eyes to the LORD he loved. Contemplating God gave him refreshed perspective. “The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life,

of whom shall I be afraid?” God is light, salvation, and strength. The enemy may seem larger than life to us. But the enemy is not as big as our God. The LORD reigns. He is sovereign over all. Enemies can hurt us, no doubt. But on another level, they can’t hurt us. They can’t reach beyond this life to the next. They can’t make good come out of suffering. They can’t possess our peace, our faith and our love.

This is why David knows to seek the LORD first and above all. “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.” David means that he longs to experience the presence of his God. He longs to taste the beauty of God no matter what ugliness an enemy throws his way. He chooses to drive the enemy from his thoughts by concentrating on the majesty, power, comfort and care of his God. This deliberate focus of worship is our chief weapon against the intrusive thoughts of an enemy.

2) Sheltering in the LORD. David declares of God, “He will hide me in his shelter on the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent.” This is such a cozy picture of being taken in from the storm. Brought into a safe place and cared for by people who love you. I feel that so strongly when I am in this place with you, this sanctuary. The very solidness of the building gives me shelter. But more the welcome greetings, smiling faces and warm embraces create a sense of safety. Then lifting up our hearts in worship draws us into awareness of our Father’s presence. Coming to the table reminds us that we are fed from his own hand.

Can’t you just imagine Jesus praying this as his enemies watch his every move. “My Father will hide me in his shelter on the day of trouble.” I can well imagine that Jesus would have prayed this psalm especially on the day his sermon infuriated the people of Nazareth. They took their hometown boy to the edge of a cliff and wanted to throw him over. But then Jesus somehow just passed through the mob (Lk. 4: 30). I can hear him praying “My Father will conceal me under the cover of his tent.” We find the safe place of the Father’s arms in prayer and hold it close even in our encounters with those who are against us.

3) Staying On a Level Path. David prayed, “Teach me your way, O LORD, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies.” This is such a powerful prayer, filled with wisdom. When you have enemies, you’ve got to watch your step. When you belong publicly and passionately to Jesus in a post Christian culture, you’ve got to take care. Enemies of the gospel love to see Christians go down. We can’t go running down a dark path full of stones and potholes. This is not the time to find yourself drunk, broke and in the middle of nowhere. This is not the time to be

lost in screens. This is not the time to be stretched to the limit with no margins. Too busy. Too financially extended. Too tired and too stressed. That kind of life makes us so vulnerable to attacks of enemies either physical or spiritual. Rather, we want to live as we pray, “Lead me on a level path because of my enemies.” Father, help me to live a self-controlled, sober, level-headed life. Help me learn your ways. Free me not to try to do everything possible all the time. Make me learn to leave room for rest, for helping someone else, for connecting with you. Help me to have some reserves for a crisis.

Can you imagine what those ministry days were like for Jesus? The teaching and the healings in themselves would have been draining. But to do all that while people of standing and authority questioned you constantly? While your family thought you were crazy and political powers plotted your ruin? I can hear him say every night, “Father, lead me on a level path because of my enemies.”

Indeed, I think Jesus not only prayed Psalm 27, but found it a great source for this line that Jesus taught us to pray, “Lead us not into temptation. Deliver us from evil.” Keep us from veering off the level path of what is good, true and beautiful. This in itself keeps enemies at bay. And deliver us from the evil one and all the ways he attacks us through people.

When we discover that we have enemies, it’s a hard season. But we have a companion in Jesus. He knew constant opposition. That’s a comfort to us. But let’s also turn this around. When we reflect on our experience of having enemies, we can relate to Jesus in a deeper way. “Wow, Lord Jesus, this is hard. But this is what you faced every day. I admire you so much when I think of how you dealt with enemies. You kept your focus on your Father. You kept doing what you were called to do. You prayed for your enemies even from the cross. As I seek to stay steady against opposition, I know now a smidgeon of what it was like for you. And it causes me to love you more. As I seek to stay faithful amidst doubt and distraction, I know now just a bit of how you had to pursue your Father so faithfully. And I thank you all the more for staying true for me. So help me to take shelter in your tent, to trust the sovereignty of your Father overall, and to stay on the right path every day. Be at work in the life of my enemy with your healing, redeeming power.”

Once more, then, let’s close with a time of praying alongside Jesus. Let’s take a moment to be still and open to him.

I have offered such little resistance to temptation,
I have turned such a blind eye to the strategies of evil,
I have floated in such a bubble of just going along,
That I scarcely realize what you went through, Jesus.

I don't like even one person to be mad at me.
You faced virulent opposition
From those with God's authority,
Who wielded Scripture against you
And called your mercy a menace.
How did you take it?
What courage and trust and endurance!

Oh Jesus, my champion,
My savior who blazed a path of faithfulness
Through the tangle of temptations
And thorny, tripping branches of evil,
I pray this psalm with you now.

Only with you, sheltering in you,
Can I be confident when war rises against me
In any of its many forms of conflict.

Only with you, can I keep from falling,
To walk in faith and hope and love
Through this world to the land of the living.