

Call to Worship

We have once been far off and God has drawn us back home through Jesus. And so we come to give thanks, for we are no longer strangers, but members of our Creator's household.

And now as God's reclaimed children, we come to worship, willing to walk into the future with Christ who walks the journey home with us. Today may we be strengthened by the Holy Spirit, living faithfully as Christ's disciples in this earthly realm.

Prayer of Invocation

Unseen traveler, Risen Savior, today as we walk together the road of discipleship and faithfulness, the path of justice and peace, we acknowledge your presence, and pray that we might together fully perceive your influence, your strength, your tender love for us and all of humanity. Guide us today in our praise and prayers. This we pray with an Alleluia and an Amen!

The Word Psalm 27

Common English Bible

The LORD is my light and my salvation. Should I fear anyone? The LORD is a fortress protecting my life. Should I be frightened of anything? **When evildoers come at me trying to eat me up— it's they, my foes and my enemies, who stumble and fall! If an army camps against me, my heart won't be afraid.**

If war comes up against me, I will continue to trust in this: I have asked one thing from the LORD—it's all I seek: **to live in the LORD's house all the days of my life, seeing the LORD's beauty and constantly adoring his temple.**

Because he will shelter me in his own dwelling during troubling times; he will hide me in a secret place in his own tent; he will set me up high, safe on a rock. **Now my head is higher than the enemies surrounding me, and I will offer sacrifices in God's tent—sacrifices with shouts of joy! I will sing and praise the LORD.**

LORD, listen to my voice when I cry out— have mercy on me and answer me! Come, my heart says, seek God's face. **LORD, I do seek your face! Please don't hide it from me! Don't push your servant aside angrily— you have been my help! God who saves me, don't neglect me! Don't leave me all alone!**

Even if my father and mother left me all alone, the LORD would take me in. **LORD, teach me your way; because of my opponents, lead me on a good path. Don't give me over to the desires of my enemies, because false witnesses and violent accusers have taken their stand against me.**

But I have sure faith that I will experience the LORD's goodness in the land of the living! **Hope in the LORD! Be strong! Let your heart take courage! Hope in the LORD!**

Living the Word

Today is Confirmation Sunday. Most of you already knew that. Though they are ready to confirm with their church family today, that they believe in God, their faith journey isn't complete yet. At best they have been given a eighth grade level education about God.

Having said that many people do not get any farther than that in their Christian Education even though we are all given the opportunity to continue growing toward God all of our lives. The Lenten journey gave us six weeks to explore how we are doing in our growth toward God. Confirmation Sunday helps us reflect on our own Soul and our own journey toward God.

Psalm 27 is one of the Psalms that invites us to look at our relationship with God. The Psalmist begins with six verses reflecting on the strength they have because of their relationship with God. *"The LORD is my light and my salvation. Should I fear anyone? The LORD is a fortress protecting my life. Should I be frightened of anything?"*

Knowing God, gives us trust in God's strength and the next five verses give statements of courage in the trust of the Creator. Verse five says: *"Because he will shelter me in his own dwelling during troubling times; he will hide me in a secret place in his own tent; he will set me up high, safe on a rock."* A place in God's home, where the heart of God is...The author is acknowledging that the strength is in God. There is none other to defend us. There is no one else, only God and those who come to our aid from God. There is nothing that I can do by myself.

Yet I wonder why in verse one if the writer is addressing us or himself, as he asks, not states *"Should I fear anyone? Should I be frightened of anything?"* Who is to be convinced? The truth is that many of us put on a brave face, but we have lots of fears in our lives. We want to trust God enough, but there are so many uncertainties as to what will come next...

So if we are being asked the questions *"Should I fear anyone? Should I be frightened of anything?"* Maybe not, but I do. As limited and finite creatures, we possess no absolute certainties about what is to come and how we can prepare for the unknown. We can hope for the future, not because we have any idea what will confront us around the next corner, but because all of our hope comes from seeing the past and how God has worked and taught to us through Jesus Christ.

Conversely, we would not need hope in Christ if we had no fear; there would be no need for faith in God if everything was certain; we would not have to trust our Creator if we could handle it all ourselves. Our need is more evident when we get to verses 7-9. *"LORD, listen to my voice when I cry out—have mercy on me and answer me! Come, my heart says, seek God's face. LORD, I do seek your face! Please don't hide it from me! Don't push your servant aside angrily—you have been my help! God who saves me, don't neglect me! Don't leave me all alone!"*

Any confidence of the beginning of the Psalm, is now shaky at best. Psalm 27 offers us a loaded hint of the tension between the reality of human fears and the assurance of God's ever present help. Real fear lives alongside honest faith. Legitimate doubt travels together with genuine trust. This is why we have a need to keep examining how far we have ventured from home and what it will take for us to return home, where God has blessings stored up for us.

I have shared that I went through breast cancer surgery seven years ago. I have times of doubt and fear that it is back somewhere in my body; every little twitch and aches that seems new and lasts for more than a couple days is suspect in my mind. I can work myself into a stress as I carry that as a burden alone.

So four years ago, when the doubts had come once again, I mentioned it to another cancer survivor, who also has taken that journey beginning a few years before me. Though our journeys were different, she shared that she understood and added that she now waits three weeks and then goes to the doctor. This calmed some of my doubt and reminded me that I am never on this journey alone.

I could then surrender some of my fear to faith, knowing that God takes us through things when we put down the burden long enough to turn toward God.

This includes asking the real questions, depending on God and taking God seriously. So, even though taking time to reflect on our levels of doubt and trust can be uncomfortable, Psalm 27 can take us there and then turn us toward home.

Verse 4 says: *"I have asked one thing from the LORD—it's all I seek—to live in the LORD's house all the days of my life, seeing the LORD's beauty and constantly adoring his temple.* This is why we keep reading the scriptures and finding meaning there. They lead our hearts back home. And in the hymns we are reminded on whom we can depend. Didn't we just sing: *"and he walks with me, and he talks to me, and he tells me I am his own..."*

These are the things that the Confirmands have to embrace, because as teenagers they are really beginning to find places where they need something to hold on to, besides their parents and themselves. As parents we want to protect our children forever, but they start to slip away from our grasp, which is a good thing, though painful, for us and for them.

Just as the prodigal son thought he was ready to move on without support, there comes a time for everyone. I'm sure that his father had given him all of the warnings about the big evil world out there, before he ever stepped outside. But we all have a yearning to find out what 'evil' really is, for ourselves, and then we have to find maturity through the experiences.

We are always able to keep growing toward God. Just like in Confirmation class, the one who created us has expectations of us throughout our lives. God knows our strengths and weaknesses and expects us to keep reaching for home.

Today when the youth confirm their faith in God, we have the same opportunity. Do you believe in God? And what does that mean for you? The Confirmands have been considering for almost a year, I am inviting you to take time this week to ask yourself what that means for you.

At class each week, we said a prayer at the beginning of each class. When we lit the Confirmation Candle, which you see lit on the worship table this morning, we acknowledged Christ's presence in the room. We reviewed and added to their understanding of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

They each looked up one of the lesser known Old Testament and New Testament characters and reported on what difference, even having a small part can make in history and for others. They have done service for their church and mission work beyond our doors. Study mentors have met with them to discuss and compare their faith journeys. Prayer mentors have prayed consistently for them throughout the program.

Within the Confirmation Program there are challenges to some of what they thought they knew as truth, as they developed their own faith out of the child's faith that they had before. Their faith is maturing, but they have a lifetime to keep growing toward God. What Confirmation tries to do is to open a new door of faith for them and give them a peek into all there is to experience with God.

It cannot give them all of the answers, because none of us have those. But it may give them the faith to hold onto, when the doubts come. We weren't able to connect each one of them with each one of you, but they learn much by example.

They have witnessed you sharing your prayers, your presence in worship and at the church events, they see you putting your gifts in the offering plate. They know that many teams and committees meet, for this church to be in ministry and that each small group is made up of a number of people.

They now understand that ushering is more than just standing around and that there are some ways to be a greeter or acolyte that are better than others. We are all examples to each other. Sometimes they are singing or reading scriptures, which becomes a reminder to us all that this, too is their way of growing toward God.

It doesn't end today; nor does it end because Easter Day is over or 50 days of Easter season; but it is life-long learning. I was asked this week if an adult can be in the Confirmation Class. Yes, absolutely! I have had this blessing in years past. Just think how rich the class would be if we had more and more joining. I can promise that if you come, God will enrich and bless you even more than you know you are now.

I am still learning as well, I may have had more religious studies than you have, but I realized a long time ago, that the more I know, the less I understand and that in our doubts we are allowed to depend on God's strength. Learning to hold doubt and faith together takes patience, which is why the last verse of the psalm is "*Hope in the LORD! Be strong! Let your heart take courage! Hope in the LORD!*"