

Searched by the Psalms Series at Brentwood

February 28, 2010

Dwelling in the House of the Lord

**Ps 27 & Luke 13:31-35
(Hymns – 422, 15, 452, 655)**

Trust in times of trouble is tough.

When we encounter troubles,
our attention often shifts to what's wrong with things.
And our energy follows our attention.

Let me just say a brief word
about how I understand energy as it applies to our lives.
I think that energy lies at the core
of how God created us.
God breathed energy into us at our creation
and sustains that energy in us with every breath we take.
There are four dimensions to that energy –
physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual.
All those dimensions of our energy
interact and reinforce each other
as we mature and develop the self-discipline
to live and share the gifts of the Spirit we enjoy in Christ –
joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity,
faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.
We learn to manage and control our God-given energy,
the basic force of life that flows in us and through us,
as we practice living these gifts of the Spirit
to enrich our lives and the lives of those around us.

Wherever we focus our attention,
that's where our energy flows.
So, if our attention is on the troubles,
our energy will become engaged with,
and all too often be overwhelmed and drained by,
the negatives that we see.
Our energy will become engulfed
in anger and fear.
We all too easily feel isolated, alone,
and threatened with extinction.
We plead for help, feeling helpless in the extreme.

I suspect this is what was happening to the author of the 27th Psalm.

The list of troubles that beset him
seems overwhelming to most of us.
Let's review the list of troubles described in the text.
She (and it may very well be a she)
is assailed by evildoers, adversaries, and foes.
They threaten to devour his flesh.
Armies line up against her in the midst of war.
Family has abandoned him,
false witnesses accuse her,
and he is subject to violence.
She is filled with fears of being abandoned,
of losing sight of God,
of being cast off and forsaken.

In the midst of these troubles,
the author talks with God.
And that's the key to the wisdom of the Psalm.
The author talks with God.

Yesterday, I visited with a friend I had not seen in a long while.
I married her and her late husband back in the 1980s.
She is now 102 years old
and still as sharp and energetic as when I first met her
in her late 70s.
She was a classmate of Tommy Douglas and Stanley Knowles,
founders of the CCF and the NDP,
back in Brandon College in Manitoba in the 1920s.
Her niece, who is a close friend, asked me to visit.
She was concerned that her aunt was terrified of dying
and had no one to talk with about it.
Hardly was my tea poured
when the aunt asked me about praying.
She was concerned that God was bored with her prayers,
that they were too formulaic and stuffy,
that God already knew everything,
so why bother him with it.
It was, as I heard it, a fear in the face of death.
Her niece had said she was often nasty and bitter
to her family and caregivers
and I suspect the fear of impending death
and the anger at apparent abandonment
had a lot to do with those attitudes and behaviours.

The part of our conversation that generated the most interest for her revolved around prayer as talking with an intimate, trustworthy friend. I reminded her of that wonderful passage in John's Gospel where Jesus is teaching with his disciples in the face of his impending death and says to them that they are no longer servants of God, but rather friends of God because they know Jesus and have seen God face to face in him. Prayer, in the light of this affirmation, is talking with your best friend, who is God.

And that's what I find in Psalm 27.
The author can unload all his concerns,
all her fears and angers.
He can lament about the troubles that beset him.
She can even articulate her terror at being abandoned by God.

But he does it while talking with God!

By that very act,
that simple act of talking with God,
she affirms and witnesses to a power
greater than any of her fears.
He affirms and witnesses to a God who can be trusted,
a God who can be relied upon to help him in the midst of troubles,
to help him move through and beyond the troubles
to a flourishing life
in this world and the next.
So, even death can be faced with calm and confidence,
knowing that God is lovingly present in that transition.

Another insight came to me afresh this week
as I was searched by this Psalm,
and talked with many of you at our Bible Study of Friday evening,
and met with my friend and her niece yesterday.
The troubles the author of Psalm 27 faced
were all external.
They were things that were happening to him.
Foes, wars, family rejection, evildoers –
all outside of her and testing her faith.

What was inside of her,
what lay deep and solid in her soul,
was her trust in God.
However she might question that in her mind
as her attention and energy flowed to what was wrong,
in her heart she knew she could take courage in the Lord.

God had not abandoned her.
She was able to see the goodness and beauty of the Lord
in the land of the living.

God's gracious presence, with her wherever she went,
was truly her dwelling place.

Now, what kind of actions do these insights ignite?
What responses are appropriate
to the witness that Psalm 27 offers to goodness of God?

The Psalm itself holds the answers.

There is the loving trust that the author has in God,
enough trust to talk with God about whatever concerns arise.

There is the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving
that the author offers in worship,
singing songs and making melody
in God's presence with others,
with a community of people who share
or are seeking for
the comforts and courage that come with faith.

And there is the learning that this God offers,
the invitation to inquire openly about who this God is
and what this God does for humanity in this land of the living.
God seeks to teach us his ways of living.
He has modeled them for us in Jesus Christ.
They exert their power in the energy of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

So, to summarize then,
we enjoy an intimate friendship with God,
we dwell in the house of God's presence,
through loving trust, worship, and learning.

May these words and the insights they provoke
be acceptable in your sight and applicable in our lives, O Lord,
our inner strength and steadfast friend. Amen.

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