

## The Heart in Danger

March 13, 2022

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? <sup>2</sup> When the wicked advance against me to devour<sup>[a]</sup> me, it is my enemies and my foes who will stumble and fall. <sup>3</sup> Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then I will be confident. <sup>4</sup> One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple. <sup>5</sup> For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent and set me high upon a rock. <sup>6</sup> Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me; at his sacred tent I will sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the LORD. <sup>7</sup> Hear my voice when I call, LORD; be merciful to me and answer me. <sup>8</sup> My heart says of you, “Seek his face!” Your face, LORD, I will seek. <sup>9</sup> Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger; you have been my helper. Do not reject me or forsake me, God my Savior. <sup>10</sup> Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me. <sup>11</sup> Teach me your way, LORD; lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors. <sup>12</sup> Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes, for false witnesses rise up against me, spouting malicious accusations. <sup>13</sup> I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. <sup>14</sup> Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.

### **Luke 13: 31-38**

<sup>31</sup> At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, “Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you.” <sup>32</sup> He replied, “Go tell that fox, ‘I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.’” <sup>33</sup> In any case, I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem! <sup>34</sup> “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not

willing.<sup>35</sup> Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'<sup>[b]</sup>”

*Psalm* means song and Psalm 27 has been sung perhaps for 5000 years by people of faith. Not a static faith, one with closed eyes, but a real, lived one. Imagine these words coming from a person under bombardment in Ukraine. A person facing a serious illness. Your own lips as you tell yourself, as you ask yourself: *The Lord is my light, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?*

And then comes the universal plea. When the troubles return, the bombs fall closer, the illness. *Lord I Hear my voice when I call, LORD; be merciful to me and answer me.*<sup>8</sup> *My heart says of you, "Seek God's face!" Your face, LORD, I will seek.*<sup>9</sup> *Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away you have been my helper. Do not reject me or forsake me, God my Savior.*

Then the bombing pauses, the pain subsides, and hope returns again *"I know I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living."* Rings the song and ends with these words.<sup>14</sup> *Wait for the LORD; the psalmist tells herself be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD."* Jesus would have known this psalm, he would have sung it in synagogue. *Perhaps particularly verses 11 and 12 Lead me on the right path. False witnesses rise up against me accusing me. Jesus is in trouble.*

Just before the passage Nancy read from Luke 13 Jesus has proclaimed that *the last shall be first and the first last.* And nothing so alarms those at the top than the suggestion that they may not remain so. The Pharisees warn Jesus that Herod is plotting against him. Just as his father, also named Herod, did when Jesus was a child and word of his birth stoked fear. *Leave,* they say, hoping to kill two birds with one stone. For his words threaten them, too. But Jesus says, forcefully: *Go tell that fox that I will not stop, I know what danger I am in, but I will press on, today, tomorrow and the next day.*

But then the tone shifts to lament: *O Jerusalem,* he says, taking in all there, even those who threaten him, *the priests, the pharisees, the people, perhaps Herod and his court: How I have longed for you to find your security, your home, in me, like chicks do a mother hen.*

He sees what will happen to those who do not, *for you will have to live in that house you are making desolate.* Could they not instead listen to his call, to the call of their own heart?

From Psalm 27 <sup>4</sup> *One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life.*

The house of the Lord, not a sanctuary, not a synagogue, but the place where God dwells. The place where we know who we are, whose we are. I was growing up there was a pastor's family that send Christmas cards. They were all attractive, perfect smiles and hair, dressed in beautiful matching sweaters standing by a fireplace of a lodge in Aspen, and the letter held details of a truly charmed existence. *This wonderful thing happened this year, then this, then this, and finally this!* We were jealous, mostly because what preacher's family has the resources to go skiing in Aspen? And how do they also look so good in the same sweater? When their card would come, each year, we would read it aloud at dinner time and laugh. Whose life is like this? Why would a pastor need to pose? Isn't the soul of Christian community? It's very purpose, to share the truth of our lives. Like the psalmist makes clear we live a life between struggle and hope, doubt and assurance. That is where faith is found.

For some years I worked for the Catholic Church and took on the work of helping introduce a theology that reflected the lives and perspective of women and a new relationship with the earth. This was the early 90's and there were men, frankly, who didn't like to hear that. Some walked out of our workshops on women in the bible or made fun of us. The person who was the center of my life was unhappy that I was focusing on this – there is so much other work he felt that was more important.

It was a dangerous time for my heart: I had to choose whether my home with this man or was it with something deeper some place within myself that my heart was at home with God. We grew estranged and our life together began to fall apart, I could not cease, for I could see what it meant to women who'd been put down in the church, in their homes. At the end of that year, we had our annual planning gathering and those with whom I had worked, these quiet nuns and lay women, shared, with conviction and clarity. What we had figured out together and swayed the leaders to take a new direction. I hadn't had to say a word that seemed to anger him more. I found myself running to the chapel of that church and I don't know if I sat or fell on my knees, but the tears

poured out. All the loss, the heartache, the joy combined, and I thanked God for giving me the strength to see it through. And I went back to our home and packed my bags and left.

I'd realized that I was a chick who knew her way home. That I longed most to dwell in the house of the Lord. That the most important relationship of my life was with my inmost being. The heartland. The place in us formed by God from which God calls us to which God calls us to reside.

In that moment in the chapel, I realized the gift God had given me, by allowing my heart to enter into danger. I found my faith. Faith is not really about believing in a particular doctrine or creed. It is fundamentally more than that. Rev. Lindsay Armstrong says, *"It's about the truth of what we have known. The life of faith is grounded in experience. It is about the real mystery, awe, pain, and grace that we know."*

That's what we hear in the psalm 27. That's what we hear in Jesus' agony outside Jerusalem. Mystery, awe, pain, and grace that brought our psalmist through. That brings Jesus through and brought me through. That leads every one of us, if we are willing, into the heart land that is our home. Here's an American folk hymn, a psalm:

My life flows on in endless song, above Earth's lamentation  
It sings a real, though far off hymn, that hails a new creation  
No storm can shake my inmost calm, while to that rock I'm clinging  
It sounds an echo in my soul, how can I keep from singing.

While though the tempest loudly roars, I know the truth, it liveth.  
What though the darkness 'round me close, Songs in the night it giveth.  
No storm can shake my inmost calm, While to that rock I'm clinging.  
Since love is lord of heaven and earth, How can I keep from singing?

When tyrants tremble, Sick with fear, and hear their death knell ringing,  
When friends rise up both far and near, How can I keep from singing?  
Through all the tumult and the strife, Our thoughts to them are winging,  
So all may know God's with them yet, how can I keep from singing?