Psalm 27

Of David.

1 The L ORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?
The L ORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

2 When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh—my adversaries and foes—they shall stumble and fall.

3 Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident.

4 One thing I asked of the L ORD, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the L ORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the L ORD, and to inquire in his temple.

5 For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
he will set me high on a rock.

6 Now my head is lifted up
above my enemies all around me,
and I will offer in his tent
sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make melody to the LORD.

7 Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud,
be gracious to me and answer me!
8 ‘Come,’ my heart says, ‘seek his face!’
Your face, LORD, do I seek.
9 Do not hide your face from me.

Do not turn your servant away in anger,
you who have been my help.
Do not cast me off, do not forsake me,
O God of my salvation!
10 If my father and mother forsake me,
the LORD will take me up.

11 Teach me your way, O LORD,
and lead me on a level path
because of my enemies.
12 Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries,
for false witnesses have risen against me,
and they are breathing out violence.

13 I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD
in the land of the living.
14 Wait for the LORD;
be strong, and let your heart take courage;
wait for the LORD!
Hope beyond all human hope,
you promised descendants as numerous as the stars
to old Abraham and barren Sarah.
You promise light and salvation
in the midst of darkness and despair,
and promise redemption to a world that will not listen.
Gather us to yourself in tenderness,
open our ears to listen to your word,
and teach us to live faithfully
as people confident of the fulfillment of your promises.
We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

David, the second king of the Hebrew people, is considered the
author of Psalm 27. Psalm 27 resembles a diary or journal entry
made during a troubling time in David’s life. It speaks of being
assaulted by “evildoers,” “adversaries and foes” (Ps. 27:2). At
verse 3, David wrote of “an army” encamped against him.
Those words seem to have been written when David felt
threatened, attacked, and under siege.

Reading David’s description of his situation brings to mind what
Howard Thurman wrote in Jesus and the Disinherited about
people who live with “their backs against the wall.” Dr.
Thurman’s words bear repeating as followers of Jesus.

I can count on the fingers of one hand the number of times
that I have heard a sermon on the meaning of religion, of
Christianity, to the [person] who stands [his/her] back
against the wall… The masses of [people] live with their
backs constantly against the wall. They are the poor, the
disinherited, the dispossessed. What does our religion say to them? The issue is not what it counsels them to do for others whose need may be greater, but what religion offers to meet their own needs. The search for an answer to this question is perhaps the most important religious quest of modern life.

Psalm 27 applies to people who are working two or three part-time jobs and have no health care benefits or hope of a pension while trying to make ends meet. It applies to struggling families. It applies to “the masses of people” with this message.

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? The “masses of people” know about being assaulted by “evildoers,” “adversaries and foes.” Every day, “masses of people” feel under siege from hostile forces.

- Every day, Muslims know the feeling of being assaulted by “evildoers,” “adversaries and foes.”
- Every day, immigrants know the feeling of being assaulted by “evildoers,” “adversaries and foes.”
- Every day, people living in poverty know the feeling of being assaulted by “evildoers,” “adversaries and foes.”
- Every day, women and girls know the feeling of being assaulted by “evildoers,” “adversaries and foes.”
- Every day, people who are LGBGTQ know the feeling of being assaulted by “evildoers, “adversaries and foes.”
• Every day, black and brown and red men, women, and children know the feeling of being assaulted by “evildoers,” “adversaries and foes.”
• Every day, people desperate for affordable health care and health care providers who are desperate to provide affordable treatment know the feeling of being assaulted by “evildoers,” adversaries and foes.”

And the list goes on.

Psalm 27 is ascribed to David, but like the entire message of the Bible, Psalm 27 is about people who lived with their backs against walls.

In every time and place, the masses of people are oppressed and threatened by “enemies,” “adversaries and foes,” who resemble an army camped and poised to overwhelm them by force. Now, as then, people are besieged by threats to their existence. The Bible is a collection of literature about threatened people, threatening people, and the way threatened people held onto belief in the power of God while living with their backs against walls because of the threats.

Besieged people have run out of places to hide. They cannot over-power or out-run their enemies, so they must depend on hiding places. Psalm 27 speaks to that need at verse 5. For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will set me high on a rock.

The idea expressed by those words is protection. When we cannot run we need to hide some place where we will not be
spotted. But it is not always possible to hide. When you have no camouflage it is not possible to hide. That is when we must somehow find a place where we are out of reach, where “enemies, adversaries and foes” cannot grab us.

Whatever is hidden is out of sight. Whatever is high is out of reach. David understood that his enemies had besieged him, but even then God would hide him from their sight and keep him beyond their grasp.

So from the safety of his out of sight and out of reach place in God, David was determined to offer praise and thanksgiving. *Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the LORD* (Ps. 27:6).

David was determined to praise God even when surrounded by “enemies, foes and adversaries.” He was determined to utter “shouts of joy” even in God’s hiding place.

And David was determined to praise and thank God with courage and confidence, not timidly or fearfully. *Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident* (Ps. 27:3).

People who live with their backs against the wall cannot control what bigots, racists, white supremacists, misogynists, and other hateful people do. We cannot control how hateful people think and whether they will act on their hostile beliefs. But we can decide whether to be afraid of them. We can decide whether to face our situations with courage or with trembling hearts and
hands. Unable to run away and forced to live with his back “against the wall,” David chose – decided – to be courageous, confident, thankful, and joyful. That attitude is what Maya Angelou captured in her poem *Still I Rise* and what Langston Hughes wrote about in *Mother to Son*.

In every age and place, all people who live with their backs against walls must decide whether to look up, sing out, and resist the sinister forces of doubt and fear. We must decide to not be afraid, not lose hope, and not allow our enemies to take joy in our despair. We must decide that no matter what “enemies, adversaries and foes” do, we will not be afraid. We will not stop trusting God. We will not throw ourselves away.

After all, our greatest concern is not the threatening “enemies, adversaries and foes.” What was true for David is also true for people everywhere.

> *Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me!*  
> *“Come,” my heart says, “seek his face!”*  
> *Your face, LORD, do I seek. Do not hide your face from me.*

> *Do not turn your servant away in anger, you who have been my help. Do not cast me off, do not forsake me, O God of my salvation! If my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will take me up (Ps. 27:7-10)*

> … *Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries, for false witnesses have risen against me, and they are breathing out violence (Ps. 27:12)*
Our greatest concern is that God might turn us away. Where then can we go? What is our hope and help if God, our shelter and high tower, expels us?

The Psalmist expresses the concern of oppressed people everywhere. Will God forsake us? Has God forsaken us? If God has done so, then we have no help. If God has done so, then we are not only under siege. We are conquered.

David answered that concern prayerfully at verse 4. *One thing I asked of the LORD, that I will seek after; to live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple.* That was no prayer from a timid or trembling soul because David also prayed at verse 11: *Teach me your way, O LORD, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies.*

David prayed for God’s fellowship even when besieged by enemies. David trusted God’s fellowship when enemies plotted and launched false accusations against him. David trusted God’s leadership. And because of that trust, David declared, *I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living* (Ps. 27:14).

Don’t miss that! With enemies camped around him, David declared *I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.*

Despite false accusations, David declared *I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.* Not in the “sweet bye and bye.” Not “over in the Glory Land.” Not
“when the roll is called up yonder.” *I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.*

David didn’t explain when or how God’s goodness would show up because he didn’t know when or how. But he was confident that God’s goodness would show up *in the land of the living*, meaning his lifetime.

Beloved, believe that God’s goodness will show up here, *in the land of the living*, when it matters most to us.

Believe that God’s goodness will show up when others can witness it, affirm it, and be encouraged by it.

Believe that God’s goodness will show up despite anything and everything “enemies, adversaries and foes” try to do, hope to do, and even do.

Believe that God’s goodness will show up even if the people closest to us desert us.

Believe that God’s goodness will show up because the LORD is your “light,” “salvation,” and “stronghold!”

Then, and in the strength of that confident and courageous faith, say with David the words we read at Ps. 27:14. *Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!*

Wait in the stronghold of God’s protection.
Wait knowing that God has a hiding place for you “in the day of trouble.”

Wait, because God’s goodness is on the way.

Wait with a steady heart, a settled mind, and strong hands.

Wait, when the funds run low.

Wait, when good friends forsake you and false friends betray you.

Wait, when it looks like the enemy has the upper hand.

Wait for the LORD and declare to yourself I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.

Amen.