**Knowing God’s Light and Salvation**

Narrative Lectionary

June 30, 2019

Psalm 27 Russell Mitchell-Walker

Some of you may have heard me interviewed by CBC last week where I shared the part of my story when I was looking for a ministry position in the late 90’s. At one point I had participated in 42 interviews, some of which were second interviews in which I was open about being gay, in relationship and that we had two children. I never knew how much of a factor that information played in not getting the position. I also knew that if it was a factor, it was not the right place for us to be. Other challenges over time have included:

* our oldest son living with addictions and at one point sending him to detox as a teenager;
* Being in a different province and experiencing my father’s dying of pancreatic cancer, going to be with him a number of times through the illness but being away when he died;
* or dealing with our youngest sons drinking issues and having to call the police on our him when he was a teenager, after he threatened me with a knife, when I knew he didn’t see a Harry Potter movie as he had said.

Some people marveled at how I maintained hope during those times. I am not sure how I did either, but I seemed to have faith that deep down, when searching for a church position, the right place, the right position would come along. I knew that tough love was important as hard as it can be; and I did have the opportunity to be with my dad and say goodbye before I had to go away. It was challenging during the time, and there were doubts and struggles but I tried not to fear or lose faith that things would work out in the end, or that things would be OK. I always knew that in so many ways, I was not alone.

The psalmist in the reading today, who is often attributed as David, identifies a confidence in God and God’s presence through adversity as they begin: “The Lord is my light and my salvation…The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” He knows that in the midst of whatever hardship they will or are experiencing, that God is with them, God will see them through it. It doesn’t mean that we won’t have hardship but that God is with us. How often do we feel like God has abandoned us when we face extreme challenges in life? Where is God when bad things happen? Even Jesus felt abandoned by God in the midst of the crucifixion. But it did not last. In the depth of pain he cried out, ‘why have you forsaken me’ but before he died, says, ‘Father, into your hands I commend my spirit’ acknowledging God’s presence with him.

There is some indication in the passage that God will prevent us from having hardship or may protect the writer from their enemies, but the overall message is actually one of not fearing in the midst of their adversaries and enemies coming against them. It is a message of confidence and of God’s sustaining support through the trials. What are the ways that you have found God’s sustaining love and support when you face challenges in your life? Do you find more perspective on God’s presence once you are through it rather than when you are in the midst of it? I wonder how often we can see or notice that support, love and strength of God through others who are with us through the time. It may be that when we experience hardship and gain perspective on God being with us through it, once we are through it, that we can move through the next challenge more confident of God’s presence with us. This is the experience of the Psalmist. He has experienced much adversity, and God being with him through it, so he has confidence in God’s light, God’s salvation, God’s strength being with him in future challenges.

The psalms are often viewed as prayer. This psalm expresses the trust and hope that the author has in God. Psalms often articulate the importance of an active prayer life with God. How active is your prayer life? Do you think you need to sit down and be quiet to pray? That is one way. I know from committing to pray daily for Eastside this year, that it can be a challenge to maintain that kind of commitment. This week Richard Rohr’s daily [meditation](https://cac.org/god-interrupting-2019-06-27/) is about parenting and in Thursday’s reflection a parent who was taking the Contemplative Prayer program reflected on the challenge she had thinking about getting such quiet time at home that she was able to do while on the course. She expresses her frustration to faculty member James Finley:

“Jim, can we talk about how much harder all of this is when I’m back home? Because I get up sometimes at 5:00 a.m., desperate to have one prayer sit, and it’s like my kids have radar and inevitably one of them wakes up ten minutes later. I mean, where is the icon of the mystic with one baby on the hip, a toddler crying at their feet, cooking dinner with one hand, trying to finish work on a laptop with the other? Because *that’s* my real life.”

Jim said, “Ok, you be you and I’ll be God. And since I’m God, I’m watching you get up exhausted every morning, and I’m so touched that you want to spend this time with me. Really, I am! It just means the world to me. The thing is, I just can’t bear how much I love you. It’s too much! And so at a certain point I rush into the bodies of your children and wake them up because. . . .”

Jim paused. “*Because I want to know what it feels like to be held by you*.”

She concludes:

Yes, the interruption *is* the presence of God that I was so desperately trying to access in moments of stillness and silence. With or without the luxury of stillness and silence, God comes to us disguised as our very lives.

Prayer is not just in the quiet times, but in the busyness and chaos of life, when we can notice the interruption of love as God’s presence, God’s light and salvation, when God comes to us disguised as our very lives. So you are invited to be open to God’s presence in the everyday stuff of life. I will also continue to offer prayer services over the summer and am going to experiment offering them online through our Facebook page using Facebook Live. So if wish and are able to take time to pause in your day, check out the days of the week that I am not on vacation and the times I’ll offer the Celtic prayer service which are listed in the Eastside announcements – printed and on our website.

As we move into the summer season, the everyday stuff of life can provide us with more opportunity to connect with nature, God’s creation. Sometimes our confidence in God can be re-gained by re-connecting with the natural world. When we experience the beauty, awe, and majesty of the creation and all of God’s wonders, it can ground us in who and whose we are. In the natural environment an awareness of the limitlessness of the universe and God’s light and beauty can fill us with a sense of awe and wonder. Have you ever sat in a place with an incredible view, or watched a sunset at a lake or ocean, or quietly observed an animal in its natural habitat and felt a deep sense of gratitude for the beauty of the moment, and an overwhelming sense of God’s presence in it all? It is this feeling that can offer us the kind of confidence that the Psalmist names as my light and salvation, the stronghold of my life. For if God can create such beauty and weave everything together in such an interconnected way, then surly God is connected to me, to you, to each one of us, regardless what we are experiencing. So as we move into summer mode, may the warmer weather provide us with opportunities to ground ourselves in God’s creation, connecting us with God’s light and salvation.

What is God’s light and salvation?

God’s light and salvation can be when we feel freed from or supported in the challenging times in life.

God’s light and salvation can be when your child or someone close to you hugs you and tells us they love you for no particular reason

God’s light and salvation can be when tragedy strikes and you feel held in prayer and love and your freezer, your home is filled with gifts of food.

God’s light and salvation can be when we experience joy and laughter with friends.

God’s light and salvation can be when you gaze into the clear night and take in the stars and the vastness of the universe and experience the interconnectedness of everything.

God’s light and salvation can be when you are in the moment and are able to accept what is, know that everything will be OK.

God’s light and salvation can be when you are held in love right in the moment when we need it most.

God’s light and salvation can be when we know that we are not alone, God is with us, as we move through the chaos and pain of life.

May we know God’s light and salvation in the everyday stuff of life. May we know that we are not alone when life gets hard, and have the confidence of God’s presence and love through the love and support of those around us.