

## PSALM 27:1-10 The antidote for fear

Do you remember the weather on Thursday evening this week? The temperature reached 39 degrees, with gusty gale force winds. The smoke descended and the sky turned orange. People were evacuated from Dignams Creek and a couple of other areas, once again setting up camp on NATA oval, and descending on the Golf Club as the Evacuation Centre had been closed. People disappeared off the streets, unless they'd joined the queues at the service stations.

It felt like New Year's Eve all over again, and the fear in the community was palpable. We've been told to stay alert. The fires are still here and this unprecedented season still has at least 6 weeks to go!

How are we all travelling through these tense and frightening times?

I'd like us to look at the psalm set for this morning - Psalm 27. Tradition ascribes the psalm to David, and it is a prayer, written in the context of crisis. He would be no stranger to the fear that pervades our own community at this time.

David was faced with evildoers - people with no conscience or scruples, determined to get what they wanted regardless of who got in the way - and David was in the way.

He was faced with enemies and foes - people who opposed him with violence at every turn. He feared that a hostile army could surround him and that war could break out.

Not only that, there were people actively out to get him: there were false witnesses, inciting people against him, and people were threatening his life. That's quite a lot of tension to be living with, day in and day out!

But David responded in a way that carried him through. For him, his communion with and confidence in the Lord were the antidotes to fear.

As we look at David's prayer, it's hard not to be infected with his power over his circumstances and the passion of his heart. It's what we need to hear, in this place and at this time!

**There were two things** that enabled David to deal with his frightening circumstances: one was his *personal* relationship with God, and the other was his *concept* of God. By concept of God, I mean what David believed the nature of God to be. Was God punitive, or loving? Was God capricious or dependable? Was God someone to be trusted or someone to be wary of?

How we relate to God, and how we view the nature of God will help us through our own crises.

### 1. David's relationship with God

David's prayer begins with an exultant confession of faith:

"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?"

Note the use of the personal pronoun 'my.' The Lord is *my* light and 'my' salvation. David's faith and experience of God is personal. He has not simply absorbed a national faith, or carried on his parents' faith. He has encountered the Lord personally, and his experience of God is REAL.

David's encounters with God also moved his heart to worship. He experienced the presence of God tangibly, and he couldn't get enough. He just want more.

He says in v4 'One thing I asked of the LORD, that will I 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's the thing about worship. When we touch the presence of God in worship - it leaves us breathless, awe-struck, and always wanting more.

Worship begins with a life given to God, and to each other. As Paul says in Romans 12:1 'I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.'

From that place of devotion to God in our lives, we come together with others, and express our devotion to God as a community of faith.

You can't have one without the other. Just coming to church is not worship. Just living a good life is not worship. Both need to be present for us to truly worship God.

However, there is something about meeting with other Christians to express our worship as a community that seems to *amplify* our experience of God. With physical sound amplification, we speak into one device - a microphone - and that signal is transmitted through another device - an amplifier - and the sound comes out of a set of speakers far louder than it went in.

When we worship together, there is a sense in which all those worshipping hearts take and amplify the presence of God in our midst. If we are attuned,

we may *feel* or *sense* the presence of God among us, which is an experience that leaves us hungry for more!

To be attuned, we need to focus on God, taking in the words of the readings and music, singing from our hearts, praying from the depths of our being, and being present not only to God, but to each other. Just going through the motions each Sunday is unlikely to do it.

David knew true worship. Encountering God like this created deeper intimacy with him and filled David with praise and confidence.

I found this quote in a commentary by Dr Don Williams.<sup>1</sup>

He says, “Faith or fear—these are our ultimate options. Either we can know the living God as our *“light,” “salvation,”* and *“strength,”* or we are condemned to anguish as we move toward our final hour. The atheist philosopher Bertrand Russell put it, “The older I get, the more nervous I become.” In contrast, two weeks before his death, Pope John XXIII said, “My bags are packed. I’m ready to go.” (that would make a good song!)

A personal relationship with God is key, if we are to overcome fear. But that is not all we need. We also need to check whether our concept of God is accurate.

## 2. Our concept of God

In v 5, David says, *“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.”*

David’s concept of God was of a lover, a nurturer and a protector. Psalm 23, which we all know, is so full of this imagery. *“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures...”*

What is our concept of God?

During the week I attended a Bishop in Council meeting via ZOOM on my computer. (What’s that, you ask? It’s like the communication on Star Trek, except on a smaller screen)

The focus of the meeting was the fires and the devastation they’ve caused, and how we might support parishes that are affected. At one point we spoke of answers to prayer with the change in the weather on New Year’s Eve, and one of the people in the meeting said quietly in response, “I’m pretty angry with God right now!”

---

<sup>1</sup> Dr Donald Williams, *The Psalms* vol. 1, ed. Lloyd Ogilvie. e-sword.com

I would have loved to talk more with him, but lack of opportunity for personal interaction is one of the disadvantages of electronic meetings. It made me wonder about how he himself was traveling, and how he saw God's role in all of this.

If our concept of God is that he is a divine puppeteer, orchestrating every tiny event, manipulating the weather, controlling circumstances and events, then I can see that natural disasters, and the seemingly random outcomes of disaster and escape from disaster, could leave someone angry with God.

Sue and Gary Griffiths are very grateful to God that their home was spared as the fire rushed through Wandella on New Year's Eve. Who wouldn't be?

But does this mean that God deliberately torched Sue & Gary's neighbours' houses, and spared *them*?

There are people who would believe that (not Sue and Gary), who then find themselves asking why? Why was I saved, and someone else smitten? Does this mean I'm a better person than my neighbour? Does this mean my neighbour sinned and God is punishing them?

I have heard Christians say things like that, and it makes me cringe! We are ALL sinners, no one more than another, and the grace of God is available for all.

If my house burned down, and not my neighbour's, does this mean God made it happen to try and teach me something? That's cringeworthy as well - and I've heard Christians say that! One would hope that we do learn and grow from our suffering, as we trust God and continue to serve him - but he doesn't send calamity upon us to make that happen.

We read in Genesis 1:28, after God created humankind, that God blessed them, and said to them, "[Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.](#)"

God gave us humans charge over the earth, and responsibility for it. There are times we haven't cared for it well, and have actually managed to influence the earth's weather patterns. However, natural disasters are also part of the earth's progression towards the final coming of the Kingdom of God, when all the effects of sin will be set to rights, and all will be restored.

We read in Romans 8:19-20 "[For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility,](#)

not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”

If we believe God causes suffering, we will not trust him, and we will continue to experience fear.

If our experience of God is distant rather than personal, we will not know him, and we will continue to experience fear.

We read in 1 John 4:18, “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love.”

The antidote for fear is to know God intimately, and to trust him completely. That is perfect love.

David’s closing exhortation in this psalm is something for us to take home with us today: “Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!”

Let’s pray.