

A Place Where Trust is Practiced
Reading from the Psalms: Psalm 27

Where do you turn if you are in trouble, whether you have brought that trouble upon yourself, or are facing an outside threat, or your body has been invaded by a pathogen, or the sum of life's uncertainty has dimmed your hopes, or the *sure thing* turned out to be the *no-go disaster*, or the cracks in your confidence are not only visible but also spreading?

Where do you turn if you are in trouble? If your life mimics a film noir movie, you'll be slumped on a stool at the back of a seedy bar. If you are Scarlet O'Hara you will put on a mask of confidence and pretend all is well. If you are Nicholas Cage (aka Jack Singer) you put on an Elvis costume and jump out of an airplane (*We're the Flying Elvises, Utah Chapter*). If you are Mr. Smith you start a filibuster on the Senate floor. And, sticking with Jimmy Stewart, if you are George Bailey you go to mean ol' Mr. Potter to beg for a loan, and failing that, sit slumped on a barstool at Martini's.

Barstools get a lot of airtime in Hollywood, but while they may provide a seat for you to drown your sorrows, they rarely offer the means to deal with your sorrows and woes. So, where do you turn if you are in

trouble? It will take more than a screenwriter to craft a workable ending to your plot.

Where do you turn if you are in trouble? Our text today, a psalm of David offers an important alternative, and as we have learned in our readings this summer, David has a lot of experience with trouble whether manufacturing it for others, bringing it upon himself, enduring it in his role as a head of state, or mourning it in the tragic pathologies of his children. Rising to immense power at a young age, his abilities and victories far exceeded his maturity, and when that imbalance occurs, it can take a lifetime for maturity to catch up to ability as humility is still stuck back at the starting line.

David lived as though entitlement was a perk of power. The rules of ethics, probity, and accountability did not necessarily apply to him, or at least that was his assumption. Ergo, by the time his ninth son was born (Solomon), David had pretty much managed to violate all of the commandments. As a consequence of David's power-drunk, egotistical sense of entitlement, many were wounded and others died while he ate grapes and got a suntan on the rooftop garden of his massive house.

In David, we have seen power and possibility, justice and decency undermined by ego and entitlement, and with David's story we are forced to acknowledge the echoes of similar cracks in our own character. David is not a hero. David is us. Finite and fallen, without hope except in God's everlasting mercy and God's refusal to give up on us. The pioneering psychologist Carl Jung suggested, "Midlife is the time to let go of an over-dominant ego and to contemplate the deeper significance of human existence." I think in David we see the importance of that contemplation no matter the age group. Thus, we would do well not to dismiss David as a scoundrel or to assume his narrative of privilege, conflict, and power hold no reference to our own narratives. David is us. Finite and fallen, without hope except in God's everlasting mercy and God's refusal to give up on us.

Where do you turn if you are in trouble? Well, David goes to the Lord, not as a pure spirited saint with a righteous resume, but as a flawed individual willing to acknowledge those flaws (Remember that David did not deny or hide when Nathan confronted him over his sin against Bathsheba and Uriah — *You are the man!* And David confessed — "*I have sinned against the Lord*"). David comes to the Lord understanding that he is in over his head and in need of help. In Psalm 51, David confesses, *Wash me*

thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Here, the king with access to so many resources, understands that earth's resources are not enough to meet the demands of relationship or the pursuit of a purpose or calling.

Psalm 27 exhibits what trust looks like. Traditionally, David's pen is associated with 73 of the 150 psalms compiled in the book of Psalms, though that connection continues to be debatable. A good percentage of these psalms are prayers for help. An individual is in major trouble and cries out to the Lord for help, for salvation. We do not know what particular trouble from David's laundry list of troubles is addressed in this prayer, but the psalm articulates the supplicant's feelings and concerns in a way that makes the prayer resonate with the concerns of the troubled no matter their station in life or the categories of the worries they bear.

It is instructive that before David addresses the mess or trial that sent him to his knees, he states clearly what he believes and how he has experienced the God to whom he prays. This is not some superficial window dressing expressed to flatter God. No, these words center the supplicant, serving as a reminder of what he has known, experienced and believed.

These affirmations place the supplicant's panic in proper perspective, reducing the amount of space this mess takes up in the larger tapestry of life. How often as a youth did we lament — *My life is over; My world is ruined; I'll never show my face again; No one understands me; There is no hope* — and that was just because the Pizza Hut ran out of pepperoni. Like someone waking up from anesthesia, and through the fog realizing they are still alive, this psalm's opening affirmations refocus the memories and knowledge of the One whom they are addressing — *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?*

You could call this a *glasses on your head* moment. *Oh, no! Where are they? I can't read without my glasses! I'll flunk the test! I'll get fired! I can't live without my glasses! ... (touch of the head) Oh, okay ... Let's get to work.*

See the connection? *Where do I go? No one is listening! No one to help! Hope is lost! I'm all alone! ... The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? ... Oh, I almost forgot ... So, Lord I need to talk with you about something.*

This is the Lord who has loved David, called David, not given up on David, held David to account, equipped David all along the way, protected David from enemies large and quandaries small. You see, the opening statement of the prayer is a reminder to David or those praying that the Lord is trustworthy — *He will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble.*

In his heart, David knows this, but a nagging and insecure question mark is knocking on the door. It is like the distressed father who brought his spirit-tormented son to Jesus — *“Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief.”*

David has known and experienced that the Lord is not just some “opiate of the people.” David knows where he needs to be, who he needs to be surrounded by. Very often, through the years, I have heard members or visitors say, “I needed to be here today. I needed to hear this today” — the Proclamation of the Word, the Prayers of the People, the children saying, *God be with you here*, the words of the hymn, the voices of the choir. It’s not one thing. It’s a combination of things awakening us to the presence of God. David knows this — *“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.”*

David believes all of this, but the enemies are drawing close, the burdens are weighing heavy, and the hotline to God has been too quiet — God, show me you are there. So, David prays — *“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.”*

“Your face do I seek...” It is ironic, but the answer to David’s prayer may just be the sentiment expressed in his own words, *“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.”*

It’s not like the church is a distribution center handing out prescriptions for all that ails you, but here in worship and word, here in song and prayer, here in sacrament and celebration, here in fellowship and study, here in service and serving, here in the context of a community of flawed and foible laden folk who are never more or never less holy than you are, here together, we behold the grace of God face to face, seeing Christ in our neighbor, supporting one another through trials, serving with one another as we go forth to participate in God’s healing of the world.

Are you worried? Are you world-weary? Are you carrying too much on your plate? Are you at wit's end with family, colleagues, friends and enemies? Have you made a mess of things? Are you plagued with uncertainty, stung by doubt, haunted by fear, owned by cynicism? Are you seeking purpose but haven't found it yet? Could you use a piece of cake?

You need to be here today. I need to be here today. We need to be here today ... in the house of the Lord ... to inquire in his temple ... to interpret our world and our lives through the lens of Jesus Christ with the energy of the Holy Spirit.

Too often, far too often through the years I have noticed those who are not here, knowing their lives are at a turning point, a tipping point a breaking point, a dark place, a lonely place. They are not here, and I get it. They may be embarrassed, they may feel they are not up to seeing others, they may be self-conscious about how they appear, they may be angry with God, feel wounded by the church. They may feel they don't fit because everybody here is so put together. Wrong! They may feel their spirits are so exhausted they can't move, much less make it to church.

I get it. But what I believe is that when we are most tempted to lean away from God, from Christ's church, from this community of faith is actually when we desperately need to lean into God, Christ's church, this community of faith. You need to be here. I need to be here. We need to be here. For together through God and with this community, I believe we shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Amen.