

Our Life at the Face of the Lord

THE 16th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, Proper 20[a], September 22, 2017

Psalm 27:1-9

¹ 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?

² When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh,

my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall.

³ Though an army encamp against me,

my heart shall not fear;

though war arise against me, yet I will be confident.

⁴ **One thing have I asked of the LORD,**

that will I seek after:

that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD 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 lift me high upon a rock.

⁶ **And now my head shall be 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 **You have said, “Seek my face.”**

My heart says to you, “Your face, LORD, do I seek.”

⁹ **Hide not your face from me. Turn not your**

servant away in anger,

O you who have been my help. Cast me not off; forsake me not, O God of my salvation!

IN THE NAME OF JESUS.

The Lord says, “*Seek my face,*” and the heart of faith responds, “*Your face, O Lord, do I seek.*” I want to be there at your face to hear your word of forgiveness. I want to be at your face, when you say, “*Take and drink, this is my blood for the forgiveness of your sins.*” I want to be there at your face, along with all my brothers and sisters in the faith, along with your whole church, hearing your voice, and speaking back to you in thanksgiving, joining with my brothers and sisters to sing of your salvation. *Your face, O Lord, do I seek.*

We live our life at the face of God.

But for the sinner, to be at the face of God, is that not the most horrifying thought of all? That our life is lived at God’s face, whether we admit it or not, this is bad news.

Our parents Adam and Eve, having broken their bond with God by eating from the tree not given to them, living in their sin, they hid themselves behind a bush so that they would not have to see the face of God.

To be at the face of God is the most terrifying thing of all for the sinner.

So, in our sin, we act as if we are not at the face of God. We have a way of going on with life as if we are living our life on Earth, but somehow, Almighty God is not involved. As if, somehow, God is a few steps separated from us, he’s “out there” somewhere, in the expanse of the universe, but somehow, he’s not

right here, right now, in front of me.

Yet, we do live our life at the face of holy God. Or else he's not God, he's not almighty, all knowing, and everywhere present. But if he's true God, if he's the creator of all creation, including us, then we do live our life at his face, whether we want to think about it or not. And there is nothing more fearsome for the sinner.

At the final analysis, that is our problem with God. It's not that he's all powerful while we're just little creaturely beings. That causes God no problem at all. He created us, and our creatureliness does not offend him one bit. Our problem with God is not that he's all-knowing and we're still trying to figure out how many planets there are.

Our problem with God is, he is holy, we're not. He is holy, we're sinners. He is love, and we are those who talk about our neighbor behind his back. He is always giving gifts and speaking to comfort and encourage; we are those withholding and speaking to control and put-down.

Our problem with God is, he is holy, we are unholy. So we hear his Law and it terrifies us. And the last thing we don't to do is confront him, face-to-face. So we're more than just a little bit like our parents, Adam and Eve, hiding behind the bush.

And when God comes to us in his Word, when he calls us to his face, when he is gathering us to his Body and Blood, Satan and his demons have the perfect opportunity to tempt us to despise preaching and God's Word, because, as Satan knows, the one place the sinful flesh does not want to be is at the face of God.

You have said, [O Lord,] "Seek my face."

My heart says to you, "Your face, LORD, do I seek."

[Psalm 27:8]

The Lord says to the sinner, *Seek my face*. It is a kind invitation.

This is not God's call to come to him to be destroyed by his holiness. If that were what God wanted, he wouldn't have to invite us to come to his face, he would just do it.

This is God's call for us to come to his face. That is, to come to him as he reveals himself to us so that our face is right up to his, our eyes are looking at his gifts, our ears are hearing the words out of his mouth, and our mouths are speaking out words for his ears.

So God became Man. He took on our flesh and blood, yet without sin. He has eyes, and mouth, and ears—a face. He has a human Name, Jesus, so that we can call his Name just as surely as we can call the name Jack or Jim or Sue or Betty.

He came in the flesh, so that, instead of confronting us in his infinite majesty, in his holy power, he could confront us in the lowliness of being a man, a human, just as we are, yet without sin.

So that we could walk up to him with no fear of destruction.

For, though he has all power, though he is the upholder of all creation, it pleased him to come among us in a way of weakness and lowliness, in order to speak words of grace to us, to forgive our sins, to cleanse our consciences, so that we would be holy, just as he is holy.

Holy, not because of who we are or what we have done; holy not because we figured out how to be less human and more spiritual, or how to be more religious; but holy because he, the Lord our God, is holy, and, in his kindness, he makes us holy, by speaking to us a word to cleanse us.

So, he calls us to his face, to where he is having his Gospel spoken. He gathers us to his Body and Blood not for our destruction, but so that we would be at the face of God and hear his voice in all its kindness and mercy, saying, *I forgive you.*

He gathers us with our brothers and sisters, all of us gathered to his Name, standing at his face.

And as we see the family of God gathered, we see that some have been here since they were baptized

as infants, some are more recent invites, but we rejoice equally and fully in all. For Jesus gives us to know that those who were called on the vineyard early, and who have been here their whole life, they have had much joy, for everyday of the long stay, they have spent in the sureness and confidence that they have been placed as servants on the vineyard. And those called later in life, they have spent much of their life not on the vineyard, not with the joy every day of knowing to whom they belong, but now, even at the late hour, Jesus has gathered them, too, to his Name.

So we are given to rejoice fully and equally in all, for our brothers and sisters having been in the church for years, even decades, and to rejoice even as much, or maybe even more so, for our brothers and sisters called at a later hour in their life.

We rejoice in all. For we have all been called to the face of God. And while there was no more fearsome place to be when we were depending on the resources of our own sinful flesh, now, in our life of faith, there is no more wonderful place to be.

For, to those he gathers to his face, he is speaking kindness, he is declaring sins forgiven, he is making holy, and he is binding us to one another.

Psalm 27:7:

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 **You have said, "Seek my face."**

My heart says to you, "Your face, LORD, do I seek."

Hide not your face from me. Turn not your servant away in anger,

O you who have been my help. Cast me not off; forsake me not, O God of my salvation!

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