

September 9, 2018 In God We Trust Pt. 4 Psalm 27:7-8

The hardest thing we face, as the church is continually remembering why we are here. The hardest choice we have to make, year by year, month by month, day by day and hour by hour is the choice of being faithful to the God whom we say we seek to serve. And there are real reasons why it is hard. Our culture, the part of the world in which we live continually whispers in our ear....and it does not shout, it whispers.... You don't have to be faithful all the time. Give yourself a break!" We struggle, we all struggle, to be "in the world but not of it."

You may wonder why your minister goes on and on and on about this matter of faith. Doesn't he know that you believe. That you have convictions. That you decided that issue...to walk with God years ago. Decades ago. I do. I really do. I take your faith and your faithfulness very seriously. But I know something else too. As surely as there is God who redeems us in Jesus Christ, who is with us in the power of the Holy Spirit, there are powers and principalities that continually try to get us to take our minds off what the game is really all about...walking with God! Talking with God. Heeding HIS direction and guidance. We are the church of Jesus Christ, or at least a part of it. And the tempter understands that if he can divert our attention, get us to consider the importance of anything other than the Lord our God, he can neutralize us. Perhaps even cause us to stumble or fall or fall away.

A young man got his first shot in the big leagues, playing for the Toronto Blue Jays. He did something that has never been done before in Baseball. He got a hit, made it on base each of his first three times at bat playing for the Blue Jays. The first rookie in the history of the game to achieve that kind of thing. And of course the applause of the fans in the stadium was deafening. He had made it to big leagues. Praise in the press and on television and radio was continuous. Yesterday reality set in. Strike out. Ground out. Out. You might be tempted to say he was lucky. The fact is the problem is the same as ours as a people who cherish faith and trust in God. It is hard to stay focused. Distraction comes easily.

Throughout the verses of Psalm 27, David is struggling with the problem faced by all of us, and therefore by the church as a whole. Focus. Staying focused as life presents challenge after challenge. Staying focused as we wrestle with what we call “real life” problems and pressures. The beauty and the power of David’s gift to us in Psalm 27 is willingness to share the fact that he struggles to be faithful. There are moments when he achieves faithfulness. And there are moments when distractions do just that. They distract him, and he finds himself in great danger.

In verses 5 and 6 he commits himself to spending time in the tabernacle. His church. He commits himself to the sacrifice of praise offered to God....shouts of joy, songs of praise, making music to the Lord. In verse 7 with which we

begin this morning he turns to the matter of prayer. He will call on the Lord with his voice. Praying out loud. Asking the Lord to hear him and to answer his prayer. We have all been there. Moments in which we are afraid. Moments in which the discomfort of fear almost consumes us.

There is a verse in our Book of Praise. It was written by Ambrose of Milan who lived in the 4th century, the early life of the church. The 4th century was a time when the followers of Jesus could remember what it was to be universally persecuted. They were persecuted by the Roman Empire. They were threatened and often killed by the very world with which they were endeavouring to share the Gospel concerning Jesus. Persecuted for being different. For being honest. For being helpful to the poor and those society did not care for or care about. In the 4th century the Christian movement was emerging from persecution and beginning to struggle with recognition and even power. Here is what Ambrose wrote....

It is a prayer. You are medicine for me when I am sick. You are my strength when I need help. You are life itself when I fear death. You are the way when I long for heaven. You are light when all is dark. You are my food when I need nourishment. Amen

As it says in verse 7 of Psalm 27... "Hear my voice when I call O Lord, be merciful to me and answer me." And this week I could not help but notice that parallel to that verse is the opening line of Psalm 28. "To you I call O Lord my Rock, do

not turn a deaf ear to me.” Prayers for moments when we are not comfortable. When we are fearful of what the outcome of our struggles will be. When we know that the future is uncertain, and therefore we tremble. Tremble. Tremble.

Verse 8 rushes on with these words. “My heart says of the Lord God, seek his face. Your face, Lord, I will seek.” When our problems and our pain reaches a certain level, it is true, we know what we should do, and should have been doing, and should do all the time. David is certain his life is on the line, that his being King of Israel may be on the line. His problems, his pain, the pressures of his life and living bring him to his knees. He not only turns passionately to God, he promises to be more faithful in turning to God with his problems, pains and pressures.

It is intriguing, the psychology of faith. As the apostle Paul says in his pastoral epistle, I am paraphrasing, I know what I should do, and sometimes I do it, but sometimes I don't, looking for a more “human solution’. It is about focus, and we lose our focus so easily. It is so fragile. It is about control. And while one part of our nature wants to yield control to the Lord another part of our nature wants to take control in the interests of our wellbeing.

And we need to be very clear on this. There are times and circumstances in which faithfulness can get one in serious trouble. The history of faith in Jesus Christ is full of the stories of martyrs: men and women who were faithful, and lost their

lives to those who were in power over them. The reality of David's prayer is that he cannot tell whether faithfulness will save him, or sink him. That prayer of St. Ambrose includes the petition... "you are life when I fear death." Striving to be faithful in the midst of an unbelieving, and often insensitive world can mean, living dangerously close to the line.

In light of what we find here, we need to bare in remembrance, that Jesus was crucified, died and was buried. All Jesus had to do to live another day, was to deny HIS Messiahship. He could have chosen to strike a deal with Pilate and Rabbinical Council of Jerusalem. He could have promised to go away. He could have surrendered his teaching and disbanded the circle of disciples that gathered around HIM. HE did not because HE was, and is Jesus. HE was, and is the Saviour who offered HIS life for everyone who would acknowledge HIM.

Which is why David in his time engages in this struggle to be faithful. And it is why in our time we too must engage in the struggle to be faithful. Life will continually ask us to make choices. This world will continually put us in situations where we have to choose. In the Old Testament Joshua called the Hebrew people to focus on who they were as God's chosen people. "Choose this day whom you will serve....as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." David said in his time, "Your face Lord, I will seek." In God we trust.

Let us pray

Some choices do not seem significant. Lord, we know that the choice of faith in you is fundamental. In it we align ourselves with what the Bible says about you. In this choice we define ourselves in terms of our following you. Help us to see clearly moments in which we must decide to be yours. Help us to trust YOU as we trust none other; to serve YOU with heart, mind, soul and body. Amen