

*Let Us Worship And Bow Down (II) -  
Time In God's Presence*

*Bible Reading:  
PSALM 27*

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Max Lucado tells a traumatic tale - a chapter in the life of a parakeet named Chippie. It began when the bird's owner decided to clean his cage.....

.....with a vacuum cleaner.

She was almost finished when the phone rang, so she turned around to answer it. Before she knew it, Chippie was gone.

In a panic she ripped open the vacuum bag. There was Chippie, covered in dirt and gasping for air. She carried him to the bathroom and rinsed him off under the faucet.

Looking at this dripping mini mass of poultry, it dawned on the owner that Chippie was cold and wet..... so she reached for the hair dryer.....

A few days later a friend asked Chippie's owner how the little parakeet was recovering.

"Well", she replied, "Chippie doesn't sing much anymore. He just sits and stares."

No kidding!

Sometimes life can do that to us, can't it? We feel sucked up, washed out and blown away by one struggle or another.

The song is gone.

All we feel like doing is sitting and staring.

On a collective scale, the comfort, security and insular nature of life in North America was blown away on September 11. War came to our shores on a scale not seen since the American Civil War.

The four planes blew it away in a few mind-numbing minutes.

Then the anthrax - invisible attack by an unseen enemy.

Airlines going bankrupt; company cash flows decimated; holidays cancelled; armies mobilized and borders all but sealed ----

Western society tries to shake off the daze.

For the first time in years America has a Secretary Of Homeland Defence.

People are left in a climate of fear.

I received a package in the mail this week from Florida.

It had been ripped open at customs and torn to shreds.

On this Remembrance Day, when we salute all those who fought in wars past, fought to secure our nation's freedom, and protect the peace in which we seek to raise our children and live our lives –

we are keenly aware again how fragile that all is.

We're face to face with how quick the slip is, how steep the drop, away from peace and into chaos.

We, as a society who thought we had it all, have discovered that all we have is not too terribly much.....

..... not really.

Welcome to the club, David would say.

I'm referring to David, king of ancient Israel and legendary hero of the Jewish people. Their flag bears his star.

If there was someone who knew both sides of the fence:

- the side of good times and power

- and the side of suffering and pain

that would be David.

Royal King David had begun life as a poor shepherd's son. Was plucked from there under rather strange circumstances into the service of the king. Fought giants. Became best friends with the king's son. Later became king himself. Led Israel on an unparalleled time of national expansion and conquest. Accumulated vast riches. Was a musician of significant skill. A poet.

HOWEVER.....

David also was plotted against in a coup attempt by his own son, who was killed when David's army counter-attacked. There were years in David's life when he didn't know if he would live to see his children grow up – in the days before he became king, the reigning monarch pursued him with an army, intent on killing him. There were years of tremendous unrest that David experienced along with the entire nation of Israel:

- times when they were hit on by bands of guerrilla fighters who had the sort of resilient stealth that we see in Taliban fighters today.

- times when huge armies massed on the borders intent on crushing the Jewish nation.

David faced not only enemies outside. Along the way he was surprised by sinister elements in his own character, heart and mind that he didn't even know existed – that led him to adultery and murder.

And then there were the times that his family, including his own wife, scoffed at and ridiculed him.

So.....

What kept David from turning into Chippie the parakeet – perched on some little branch, staring ahead, all sung out?

Psalms 27 gives us the answer - a poem that David wrote.

Let's read it together –

### PSALM 27

This is a poem written in two distinct units. Perhaps the writers among you noticed the division - comes at the end of verse 6.

The first section is one of great confidence.

The second one sounds a note of lament.

The first section is one of invitation.

The second is one of appeal.

The first speaks to the audience - you and me - and talks **about** God.

The second section stands together with the audience and speaks directly **to** God.

Verses 1-6; 7-12.

The last two verses are sort of a cap on the whole thing; both sections.

On this Remembrance Day, we listen in a special way when, at services and on documentaries, war vets share with us some of their haunting memories and remind us of how precious and costly peace is.

When they speak, we listen. They have earned the right to speak with authority. Their medals are silent testimony to that.

Psalms 27 is, as one preacher termed it, "Advice from a Vet" [Brian Attwood, Huntsville Baptist Church]. David is a veteran in every nuance of the term - he's fought military combat, social upheaval, family conflict, and inner struggle.

And it's out of that context, bearing the memories and the pains that he writes:

*"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?*

Enemies? Armies? War?

Through all that God remains a source of security.

And David the poet throws various images our way in the first segment of this psalm, images meant to help our minds picture this amazing cosmic truth:

Safe dwelling;

A sheltering tabernacle;

The idea here is the ancient Middle Eastern role of a host who protects his guest; it's the sort of thing expressed by the Taliban regime towards America regarding Bin Ladin – *"This man is our guest, he is in 'our house.' We will fight for him. We will protect him. You may NOT have him."*

Verse 5 also gives the poetic image of a solid rock.

In an art gallery in Florence, Italy, two paintings that feature a similar theme hang near each other. They are scenes of sea storms.

The first has wild waves and fierce lightning flashing across the sky. In the raging waters the face of a despairing, drowning man can be seen just above the surface.

The other painting has a similar wild storm, but in the middle of the water is a huge rock. The waves crash against it. If you look carefully, you'll see - tucked in back of that rock, hidden in a crevice – a dove, sitting safely on her nest, protected from the storm.

That rock, says David to his audience - to you and me -  
that rock is God.

When the bottom drops out of your life, He'll protect you.

Keep you.

With you.

For North America society, the bottom dropped out - literally - when the Trade towers came crashing down.

Sometimes we experience the bottom falling out in own lives. Some of you have experienced what the employees of Canada 3000 went through on Friday - whoomp, out of a job. Financial security gone in the space of one brief memo.

Or what you've been dreading shows up on the ultrasound.

Or the police call. *"Sir, it's about your daughter..."*

Or the one with whom you'd hoped to build a long-term relationship says, *"forget it."*

Somewhere along the way this happens to everyone.

No sense trying to kid ourselves that it'll be different for us; that somehow we're immune from it.

How to cope?

David presents a rather singular vision - he's got a one track, one step proposition on how to deal with all these dangerous uncertainties we face -

- it's the vision he tosses towards us in v.4.

*One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I see:*

*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 seek Him in His temple.*

When you stare into the face of God, says David, all the other problems and challenges of life fall into a better perspective.

Hence v.8:

*My heart says of you, 'Seek His face!'*

*Your face, Lord, I will seek.*

Back to verse 4..... and notice the key place that David fingers as the place where the face of God can be sought -

- the place where one can find and experience the reality, the truth, the power of God.

Do you see it there?

David seeks God.....

**.....in His Temple.**

When the world begins to go crazy, when everything else seems to be coming apart, when it suddenly starts to dawn on you that life isn't quite as secure as you once thought it might be -  
- head to the Temple; flee into the presence of God.

In today's terms – hustle yourself to worship.  
Get with a gathering of other believers in the Lord, people just like you,  
and in a world that drags you down.....  
.....look up.

Get focussed on, connected with, and related to the One who is Light and life and safety.  
The only real Light in what otherwise is a dark, dark world.  
This same poet, David, said in the famous words of Psalm 23:  
“*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.....*  
Remember the next words?  
.....*for you are with me.*”

*Lord, you are my light and my salvation!*

That's the point of weekly worship - it's why we expend so much effort at doing this, not once, but twice each week.  
We take this special day, Sunday, and spend time at the beginning and end of it in worship. We bracket this holy day with God.

Weekly worship is not meant as some lullaby to the soul.  
It is not meant to titillate our senses with consuming pleasure.  
It is not meant as mind-numbing comfort food.  
It is not meant, first of all, as a social gathering point.  
It is not meant to be a holding bin for traditions and heritage.

*Seek His face.....*  
Worship brings us into the presence of Divine Light, Divine Life, Divine Strength.  
Worship lines us up with people like David, who - king or not - are very human folk, with plenty of frustrations, weak moments, times of distraction, chapters of temptation and wanderings, needing direction and encouragement, protection and assistance.

When you read the second section of the psalm, v.7-12, you get the sense that David is walking a razor's edge; that it'd only take one moment's hesitation, one wrong step, and everything would start to come apart - his enemies would jump all over the opportunity.  
Which is not too far from the truth for most of us, right?

Left to ourselves it **would** come apart - somewhere along the way.

So thanks be to God that He doesn't leave us alone.  
He has come to be among us, with us, One of us through His son Jesus Christ.  
Jesus is the face of God revealed:  
- the face of God walking in the midst of the human race.  
- the face of God seeking humanity.

Jesus is the voice of God saying to those who give their lives to Him:  
*John 16:33 "...In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*

And as we look to Jesus, to His sacrifice for us, His suffering on the cross and power-filled resurrection from the Tomb;  
As we gather in weekly worship to remember and re-focus on these important historical truths;

As we celebrate and reaffirm them with fellow believers

As we do that we gain new courage and hope as we hear these words of scripture:

*Rom 8:31-32 31 – What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all - how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*

And as we hear that from each other in all the acts of worship -

in our singing, our scripture readings, our dramas, our sacraments, our testimonies, our sharing and praying, our greeting, our quiet, our fellowship;

as we do that in this dedicated, set-apart space with unique art work and architecture that helps us to focus, and draws to mind the great truth and person of God.....

.....as we experience all that -

*- seeking Him in His temple -*

we find our hearts encouraged

our minds refocused

our spirits refreshed

and our future, both on earth and in heaven, hope-filled.

We find ourselves resonating with the closing words of Psalm 27 -

the steeple on the poem, as it were

the capstone

*I am still confident of this:*

*I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.*

*Wait for the Lord;*

*Be strong and take heart..... and wait for the Lord.*