

Psalm 27 Meets Daily Life

March 4, 2007

Rev. Mary A. James

**Lay Reader:**

*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?*

*When evildoers assail me,  
uttering slanders against me,  
my adversaries and foes,  
they shall stumble and fall.*

*Though a host encamp against me,  
my heart shall not fear;  
though war arise against me,  
yet I will be confident.*

*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.*

**Mary:**

He had been in and out of the hospital a number of times. A very dignified man in his sixties, he hailed from the Baptist tradition. His adversary was a chronic and terminal lung condition that robbed him of breath and of the ability to do the things he loved to do. Sometimes he couldn't speak because of all his wheezing and coughing. Still, he would always ask for a visit with the chaplain when he came in. It was always striking that no matter how short of breath he was, he would inquire of her, "How are you today?"

He never lost his interest in others. He always wanted the chaplain to pray with him.

The last time she saw him in the hospital, he said he knew he was near the end of his life. She said to him, "Joe, (we'll call him Joe, but that was not his real name) you have been through so much. How are your spirits holding up?" Joe looked at the chaplain, looked right into her eyes, and offered a smile that can only be described as calm and soft. He said, "I'm doing well. I am never afraid." His voice filled with emotion, and, with some difficulty because of his labored breathing, he went on, "This may sound strange, but I had an experience once during this illness where I felt this huge sense of God's presence and love. He told me he would take care of me through it all, that it was going to be alright--- and that even though my illness couldn't be fixed, he would see me through it and never leave me. So, I am peaceful. I am fine."

**Congregational Response**, in song: *Do not forsake me, O God of my salvation.*

**Lay Reader:**

*to behold the beauty of the Lord,  
and to inquire in his temple.*

*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 upon a rock.*

*And now my head shall be lifted up  
above my enemies round about me;  
and I will offer in his tent  
sacrifices with shouts of joy;  
I will sing and make melody to the Lord.*

*Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud,  
be gracious to me and answer me!*

Just when we think winter will never, ever go away, and that the ground will be frozen and hard forever, they appear. They look like little green spears pushing their way up through the ground, and sometimes they reach right up through the snow. Tenacious and indestructible, they are survivors. Later on, when the weather warms up, they will surround us with a riot of that wonderful creamy orange-melony color everywhere we look. In our gardens, by the roadsides, spreading like wildfire, there will be so many of these lilies; they might even begin to seem ordinary. But something so determined and so strong is not to be taken for granted--not something that springs so green from the ice-encased ground, even when our morning thermometers tell us that winter is not yet the memory that even those of us who love it wish it would be! The orange lilies are a divine gift, a sprig of hope, life arising out of death, resurrection made real. In teaching of God's love for humanity, Jesus once said "Consider the lilies of the field." Indeed, in the midst of winter, let us not forget the lilies.

**Congregational Response:** *Do not forsake me, O God of my salvation.*

*Turn not thy servant away in anger,  
thou who hast been my help.  
Cast me not off, forsake me not,  
O God of my salvation!  
If my father and my mother forsake me,  
the Lord will take care of me.*

Sometimes, all we need is a shift in perspective, a determination not to create problems and stress when life itself will give us stress enough, and the wisdom to seek God's help when real problems do arrive. Sitting in a coffee shop one day, I saw a little girl about two years of age walking along the sidewalk with her mother. It had rained earlier in the day and there were puddles all over the walk, with a particularly large one right in front of the coffee shop's picture window. The child got out a little bit ahead of her mom, who was also juggling some bags, and all of the coffee shop patrons sitting there could see what was coming. Toddler meets big puddle. Mom gets irritated and frazzled. Toddler gets disciplined. Big tears. We sat frozen waiting for it all to unfold, helpless to intervene, because it was all happening really fast.

The child, who had these great little rubber boots on, stepped into the puddle. She looked down at it, transfixed. She tentatively made a little splash, which got her pants wet. Mom caught up with her, and the little girl looked up at her. All the spectators held their breath. And Mom, God bless her—obviously, God was blessing her at that very moment—this Mom broke into a huge smile, and said "Puddle!" The little girl splashed again, this time with more gusto, sending a spray of water pretty much all over herself. Her Mom laughed! Encouraged, the little girl began to jump up and down in the water with both feet landing at once, laughing so joyfully and so boisterously that all of us looking out the window broke into laughter. A small crowd of passers-by began to form, all joining in with the marvelous, magnificent discovery of what clearly was the most fascinating puddle EVER. What could have been a moment of stress and tears became a moment when a child experienced discovery and delight, and a group of twenty adult onlookers got to experience what it feels like to be two years old and loved--and to remember what a wonder a puddle of rainwater on the sidewalk can be.

From the propensity to make mountains out of molehills, may we be delivered. And for real problems, may we have the sense to seek the shelter of the wings of Jesus, who, according to Luke, was the original "mother hen".

**Congregational Response:** Do not forsake me, O God of my salvation.

**Lay Reader:**

*Teach me your way, O Lord;  
and lead me on a level path  
because of my enemies.*

*Give me not up to the will of my adversaries;  
for false witnesses have risen against me,  
and they breathe out violence.*

*I believe I shall see the goodness of the Lord  
in the land of the living!*

*Wait for the Lord;  
be strong, and let your heart take courage;  
yea, wait for the Lord!*

**Mary:**

She was in her late forties, far too young to have to be counting down to her last day. Hospitalized for an infection related to her cancer treatment, which at this point was to provide comfort rather than cure, she had asked for a visit with the chaplain. Clearly once a classically beautiful woman, her skin was covered rough scales related to her condition. Still, she greeted the chaplain with a certain exuberance, sitting cross-legged on her bed, surrounded by books and CD's. She asked the chaplain to sit down and talk, and they did. She spoke of her journey with her illness, how she wished it could've been cured, and how she had accepted that it wouldn't be. Despite her damaged skin, her thin frame, and oxygen tank, she exuded a kind of joyful energy. She used words like "gratitude" and "peace" and talked about how wonderful her community of faith had been to her through her illness. After a while, she seemed to tire a bit, and it was clear that the visit needed to wind down. Just as the chaplain was about to ask her if she'd like to pray, she leaned forward and reached with both of her hands for the chaplain's hands, saying "Will you say a prayer?" Reaching for the right words, which felt something like sifting through dirt looking for gold nuggets, the chaplain prayed, stumbling into words of comfort, words of peace, words of reassurance. At the moment the chaplain was ready to release her grasp, the woman held tightly on. She said, "And now, let me say a prayer for you." From her lips came a prayer that was full of eloquence and essence, pure in heart and so generous....a prayer of blessing for the healthy chaplain from the cracked and sore lips of one who would not live another full week. The woman's cancer could have been the enemy of her spirit. Relying on God's love, she did not ever let that happen.

**Congregational Response:** *Do not forsake me, O God of my salvation.*

**Mary:** Amen.