

Rideau Park United Church
Sermon: Welcoming the Light (Rev. Jim Baldwin)
Sunday, January 25, 2026

The LORD is my light and my salvation;
whom then shall I fear?
the LORD is the strength of my life;
of whom then shall I be afraid?

Psalm 27 is commonly attributed to King David, but we are not really sure *when* it was written. What we do know is that it was written during a period of intense, violent opposition and it reflects a time of extreme danger, where enemies, armies, and false witnesses surrounded him...and yet...he remained deeply confident in God's protection, presence and eventual victory.

One would think that it would be easy to pin down a time when David was surrounded by his enemies, however, his was a reign that was plagued with conflict from beginning to end:

After gaining popularity by killing Goliath, David faced intense jealousy and the murderous rage of King Saul; forcing him to live as a fugitive for 10 – 15 years.

Throughout his reign, David engaged in constant battles to secure Israel's borders, fighting the Philistines, the Moabites, the Ammonites and the Arameans.

Following Saul's death, David was king of Judah for seven years while fighting a civil war against Saul's son, who ruled the Northern tribes.

His own son, Absalom tried to overthrow him, forcing David to flee Jerusalem and causing yet another civil war.

And in his old age, another son attempted to seize the throne before Solomon was crowned.

In addition to his political and military battles, David experienced intense and prolonged grief over the deaths of his children, and it has been suggested that in his final years, he may have suffered from physical frailty, dementia, and cognitive impairment; which led to manipulation by his court.

If that wasn't enough, David struggled throughout his life with faith, with fear and with the weight of guilt that he carried from his past sins.

Any one of these things could represent the enemies and troubles he is facing in Psalm 27, and no one would blame him for being afraid, or questioning whether God will turn away and forsake him. But what could have been a song of lament turns into an affirmation of faith.

How does he do it?

By following the example of the Hebrew people who had gone before him; a people who had experienced great adversity in their lives, and responded to uncertainty and fear, with worship and praise.

To this day, Jewish people use the memories of God's presence and actions in the past, as a primary source of strength, resilience and hope for the future. This practice is rooted in collective memory, which transforms historical events into living experiences that affirm God's enduring covenant and faithfulness – especially in times of crisis:

The Passover meal ensures that every generation feels as though they personally left Egypt, and it fosters the belief that if God delivered them once from oppression, God will do it again.

And by recalling how God provided for their ancestors during their time in the wilderness, they find strength to face an uncertain future; trusting that God will provide the same divine guidance that led them to the Promised Land.

This practice of remembering involves daily prayers, weekly rituals and special memorials; all designed to inspire faith in God.

Chad Bird is an Old Testament scholar, an author and co-host of the pod-cast “40 Minutes in the Old Testament.” He has some interesting things to say about the Hebrew conception of time, which he states is radically different from the way we think of the past and the future.

He says that when we talk about the future, we use language that suggests we are walking *toward* the future. But for the Hebrews it is just the opposite.

In the Old Testament, when the Hebrew people spoke about the past, they used the word “Kedem” which means *in front*. And when they spoke about the future, they used the word “Acharie” which means *behind*. So, for Old Testament people, the past was in front and the future was behind, which meant that they walked into the future facing backwards.

Now, that sounds pretty ridiculous, if not dangerous, but here is the logic. When **we** walk into the future **our** eyes are focused on what is to come, but for the Hebrews, **their** eyes were focused on what had already been. “Why is that so important?” asks Bird.

“When you think about the future, sometimes it’s scary. Sometimes we get the idea that the sky is falling and that the whole world is crumbling around us. And maybe we’re going through a really tough time and we don’t know how we’re going to face tomorrow, and we don’t know how we’re going to walk into the future.

Well, the Hebrews help us here. The Old Testament directs us to see our own lives, and our journey *through* life in a different way. Because when we walk into the future, facing backward, what we see in that past, is the faithful, loving, ongoing action of God on our behalf.

That is our hope. The past says the same thing over and over again, that God is not against us, God is for us, and will always be for us, no matter what comes our way.”

The LORD is my light and my salvation;
whom then shall I fear?
the LORD is the strength of my life;
of whom then shall I be afraid?

In a very challenging time of life, David begins his psalm with an affirmation of faith that sums up his relationship with God. “God is my light and my salvation; the strength of my life.” Light, salvation and strength...but there is more.

A couple of months ago, when I spoke about Psalm 23, I shared a commentary that said “The real power of the psalm is found in one small word...‘my.’ The Lord is *my* shepherd.” And we see it here again...”the Lord is *my* light and *my*

salvation...the Lord is the strength of *my* life...the Lord shall keep *me* safe in his shelter...and hide *me* in his dwelling...and set *me* high upon a rock.”

Once again, the power of the psalm is in that one, small word that speaks volumes about the importance of nurturing a personal relationship with God. This is what will give us strength in difficult times and allow us to have hope for the future...no matter how challenging it may seem.

Theologian and author Paul Tripp says that this is why it is so important to study the nature of God. He says, “Theology is meant to be personal; it’s not ever meant to be just something you do with your brain - but something that redefines who you are as a child of God, and therefore, redefines the way that you live your life. David’s not **un**afraid because he has power. He’s afraid because he knows that he is a child of God.”

Studying, worshiping, singing, praying...daily prayer, weekly rituals, special memorials, these are all ways that we, like David can strengthen our relationship with God...as children of God...and when we do...then we like David may proclaim, “I will offer in God’s dwelling an oblation, with sounds of great gladness; I will sing and make music to the Lord.”

There will always be difficult times ahead of us...there will always be people who threaten our happiness and peace of mind...but when they do...we just need to sing and pray even louder – and trust that the Lord is our Light and Salvation...the Lord is the stronghold of our faith...we are the children of God no one can take away the joy that is ours. Amen