

Grace Lutheran Church
Second Sunday in Lent + March 13, 2022
“Just You Wait” (Psalm 27) Pastor Nancy M. Raabe

*Just you wait, Henry Higgins, just you wait
You'll be sorry but your tears will be too late
You'll be broke and I'll have money
Will I help you, don't be funny
Just you wait, Henry Higgins, just you wait
Just you wait, Henry Higgins 'till you're sick
And you screams to fetch a doctor double quick
I'll be off a second later
And go straight to the theater
Oh oh oh, Henry Higgins, just you wait.*

Well, that is one use of the phrase - the act of waiting as sweet revenge. Eliza Doolittle is furious at the bullying Henry Higgins has been subjecting her to, in try to teach her to speak with a proper British accent, and her anger boils over in vivid images of how she plans to give him what he deserves.

Or the phrase “Just you wait” can carry excited anticipation about something you want someone else to discover for themselves: Just wait until you see that movie! Just wait until you eat at that restaurant! Just wait until you try Jeni’s Darkest Chocolate! You’re going to love it!

This sense gets closer to where we are going today--the call to wait on the Lord as a consummate expression of trust. Psalm 27 takes us there by means of a soul-stirring journey through the depths of despair that comes out at the other end with one of the most powerful affirmations of faith in all scripture. But not without a wild ride.

We can think of it, in fact, as Mr. Toad’s Wild Ride - which I think is still an attraction at Disneyland, right? Who remembers Mr. Toad’s Wild Ride? Growing up half an hour from Disneyland, my parents took us to Disneyland once a year back when it hardly cost anything, After “Mr. Lincoln Speaks,” this was my favorite thing there.

I vaguely remember Mr. Toad’s Wild Ride as being both exhilarating and terrifying. There was a lot of darkness as your little car careened along, scary things jumping out at you, lights flashing, weird voices overlapping. Sometimes you hardly knew which end was up, until you finally came out at the other end, and boy, was it good to be back in the daylight again.

Just like in Psalm 27. Let’s follow it through. First you need the road map, so you might want to open your bulletin to the page where the psalm is printed.

Imagine now that you have just stepped into your little car. The safety bar has magically latched into place. The car slowly begins to move, the mysterious double doors open and you enter into darkness. But it is not just the absence of light; it's spiritual darkness, that state of unknowing that calls everything into question.

To put ourselves there, I want you to close your eyes. Breathe deeply. Now, bring to mind the most desperate situation you have ever been in, one that called into question your most basic assumptions about life, about what you thought you knew, about who you thought you were, and the control over things that you thought you had.

Now picture where you were at this particular time. Imagine your surroundings, your context.

Now, grasp onto what you were feeling. Perhaps it was a soul-crushing loss that made you wonder whether you could even go on one more day. Or something someone said, or did, that brought your entire vocation into question. Maybe it was the realization that evil was closing in and you had no way to stop it, much like what is happening in Ukraine every day now to ordinary people just like us. Maybe you felt despair darkening the horizon and beginning to flood toward you.

Open your eyes, and this is the context for verse 1. This is where the psalmist begins - not with certainty, but of dark apprehension: "The Lord is my light...whom then shall I fear? Of whom shall I be afraid?"

And in fact in verse 2, evildoers are closing in who want to consume him. In verse 3 the armies have surrounded him. In the midst of this terror, he lifts his cry to God in verses 4 and 5: Only in your holy sanctuary can I escape them and find shelter; verse 6, only there do you lift me high above them. But then in verse 7 doubts sweep back in - *Are you really there, Lord? If so, hear my voice and have mercy on me!*

In verse 8, he has lost sight of God, even though he knows God desires him to seek only the Lord. In verse 9, fear is gnawing at him: O Lord, have you turned away? Are you angry with me? Verse 10, surely you do not forsake your children. Even if our earthly parents should cut us off, O Lord God, you would never do that, would you? In Verse 11 he is desperate for God's level path. He has been thrown completely off course by his oppressors. In Verse 12 he laments, only their false claims against me are being heard, and I have no means to disprove them.

And then comes the great turn in verse 13, the great outpouring of faith in which the psalmist suddenly turns to address us in way that requires us to get personally involved in completing this verse. The original Hebrew actually gives us only the first clause of an unfinished conditional sentence, which literally translated reads like this: "Unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living...."

Now the problem is that every single translation, including the NRSV, completes this sentence. I think that does the psalm a disservice, because this is a cliffhanger every bit as dramatic as the fate of Mr. Toad: What is the story here? Did he steal a car, get drunk in a bar, get convicted of a DUI, get run over by a train and go to hell, as the ride seems to suggest? (And how did I remember all this? I didn't - I found as a video someone made of the ride as they were going through, which by the way has a million and a half views.)

But back to our cliffhanger: "Unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living..." How would YOU finish it?

"I couldn't have made it to the next day." "I couldn't have survived." "I couldn't have found the strength to go on." "I would have thrown in the towel." "I would have forgotten to pray." "I would never have met you."

This is critical, because the way you complete that verse will take you authentically, through your own experience, to the final ringing closing verse of Psalm 27, that great expression of trust that carries us through our most harrowing times. Wait for the Lord and be strong. Take heart and wait for the Lord!

This expression of trust will always carry the careening car of your soul past scary things jumping out at you, past lights flashing, past weird voices overlapping and the world turning topsy-turvy, all the way back out, where car finally slows again and the safety bar magically moves back, allowing you to step out into God's arms of love, which were there all the time, just waiting to catch you. And now, having survived the wild ride, can give this same assurance of faith to others:

Wait for the Lord and be strong. Take heart, and wait for the Lord!

Amen.