



still waters

home church studies

Psalm 27.1, 4-9 [Worship]

1 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? 4 One thing I asked of the Lord, that I will seek after: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple. 5 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 on a rock. 6 Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the Lord. 7 Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me! 8 "Come," my heart says, "seek his face!" Your face, Lord, do I seek. 9 Do not hide your face from me. Do not turn your servant away in anger, you who have been my help. Do not cast me off, do not forsake me, O God of my salvation!

Consider:

[Words]

There is something about the darkness that is ominous and scary, when powers we cannot see haunt and threaten us. These texts look the darkness of oppression and abandonment in the face, receive the light, and become fearless.

The poem in Isaiah imagined a new king who would be light against the darkness of Assyrian oppression. Matthew takes over the poem of Isaiah and quotes it with reference to Jesus (Matthew 4:15-16). Jesus then issues an imperative summons to repent. The repentance to which he summons is a bold recognition that the world has changed. It is under new governance! His governance of light, freedom, joy, and well being has displaced the old governance of exploitation, oppression, fear, and anxiety. Jesus enacts a dramatic transformation of the world.

We read Psalm 27 in the context of the "light" of Isaiah and Matthew. The psalm avers that God is "my light and my salvation;" cringing fear of the dark is no longer appropriate. God is a presence and shelter who protects from every threat.

When "the light" is acknowledged in the church, there is no need for contentious quarreling. Paul addressed the Corinthian church in deep dispute (verses 12-13). Those addressed are invited to gather around the cross that summons beyond petty self-regard to be "in agreement" and "united in the same mind" (verse 10). Only those frightened in the darkness use their energy to quarrel.

– Walter Bruggemann

[Scripture] 1 Corinthians 1.10-18

10 Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. 11 For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. 12 What I mean is that each of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." 13 Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? 14 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name. 16 (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) 17 For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power. 18 For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Question: The writer of Matthew asserts that Jesus is the Messiah, but what does this mean if he is not a warrior king - and how do the different gospel writers differently show Jesus' relationship with John the Baptist? As we see the gospel writers shape their portraits of Jesus to fit the stories they are telling, we need to ask ourselves and each other how we do the same. Struggling with questions as old as our tradition, we must ask, Who do we want Jesus to be and why? How do we try to make him fit our story? And who, in real-world practical and economic terms, do our portraits serve?

Reread Matthew 4.12-23 &
Isaiah 9.1-74