

Take Heart Psalm 27

Second Sunday in Lent/ 13th March 2022

This morning, I hope that the psalm will speak and will preach for itself. We just walked through the psalm slowly, singing throughout the reading, “Wait for the Lord, whose day is near. Wait for the Lord; be strong; take heart.”¹ Psalm 27 is the lectionary for the second Sunday in Lent, and it comes just at the right time this year. For our hearts are heavy. Our hearts are broken with the daily news coming from Ukraine and Eastern Europe—evil being unleashed indiscriminately on innocent people, destruction, devastation, and death, more than two million refugees, families separated, and consider the plight of the children, as well as the elderly and disabled who are unable to flee Ukraine. All of this is happening so far away, yet it’s close, very close to us. Last night, I had a restless night of sleep and woke up multiple times with dreams about Poland. Then I read first thing this morning in *The New York Times* about the attack on the [International Peacekeeping and Security Center](#) in Ukraine, less than a dozen miles from the Polish border.² The war is touching us both consciously and unconsciously.

How do we deal with all of this? How do we take it in? How much are we willing to take in? Or are we afraid of being overwhelmed by it all? Do we shut down? Turn off the news? Disconnect? You have to determine what is best for you, what you can manage. The question remains: how do we care for ourselves at the same time, in our own way, respond with compassion, allowing our hearts to lead the way?

We can care for ourselves by being honest about what’s weighing heavily upon our hearts, what we’re holding in our hearts, what we’re feeling—especially when that feeling is fear. It’s okay to be afraid. It’s essential to name our fear. But we don’t have to get lost or stuck or paralyzed by fear. Then we are bound by our fears, and our fears choose for us. “Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident” (Ps. 27:3). When war rises around us, the psalmist tells us we can be confident because God is faithful. The psalmist is confident because his heart rests in the faithfulness of God, and the heart knows things that we need to know.

The psalmist cries, “Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me! ‘Come,’ my heart says, ‘seek his face!’ Your face, LORD, do I seek. Do not turn your face from me” (Psalm 27:7-9). “Come,” my heart says! My heart says, “Come!” The *heart*. Not the mind, but the heart. In the Hebrew scriptures and the New Testament, the heart is understood as the core of the physical, emotional, and spiritual life of human beings. Language reflects this truth. The English word “core” is related to the Latin *cor*, which translates as “heart.” You see this connection in French; the word for “heart” is *coeur*. In the Bible, the heart, not the brain or the head, is the center of all vital functions, including intellectual life. From a Jewish perspective, we could say that we *think* with our hearts. The heart is the source of emotions and feelings. It’s the center of our spiritual lives, of our relationship with God. Thought, feelings, and action all flow from the heart. The heart has wisdom and a will, a desire; it knows what it wants, and it knows what it needs. The heart is the core of one’s being.

The heart is also the source of so much pain and the source of our alienation from God. Jeremiah wrote, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). In Proverbs, we find this warning, “Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life” (Prov. 4:23). You can see why the psalmist prayed, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me” (51:10). We find God’s promise in Ezekiel, “And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh” (Ezekiel 36:26). This same understanding of the heart is found in the New Testament, in the teachings of Jesus. Increasingly, I’m coming to view Jesus as a cardiologist, who was concerned about the state of our hearts and sought its healing. He knew the dangers of a divided heart. Did he not say, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8)? And did Jesus not say, “For where your treasure is there will your heart be also” (Luke 12:34)? We can also reverse this and say where your heart is there will your treasure be also.

A divided heart, alienated from God, our neighbor, and ourselves is the source of so much pain and suffering in the world. Did not Augustine (354-403) confess, “You have made us for yourself, O God, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you”?³ Heart, not mind.

Hearts at rest. Resting in God. Hearts trusting and waiting in God. Waiting on God. There’s a strength and confidence that come when we are resting and trusting and waiting on God, when, like a taproot, the heart grounds itself, when the self—body and soul—grounds itself in that which holds all things. The psalmist tells us, “Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!” (Ps. 27:14). I love the link between heart and courage. The French word for “heart,” *coeur*, is the root of the word “courage.” It’s a state of the heart.

Several years ago, the Presbyterian Church in Arlington, VA, was confronted by a dilemma: they were declining in membership but situated on a valuable piece of property. The Session started a discernment process to figure out what to do, and it that began with this question, “For whom are our hearts breaking?”⁴ This question led the way. After much prayer and struggle and discussion, they decided to close as a traditional church, tear down the sanctuary, and replace it with a 173-unit affordable apartment community, desperately needed in that part of Virginia, provide support and services to the residents of the new community throughout the week. The congregation would still meet for weekly worship but in a new sanctuary on the premises. As one church member recalls, “the call to create affordable housing was bigger than the old building itself – so, the walls came down.” Both the apartment community and the church are thriving today. Doesn’t the psalmist say, “The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit” (Psalm 34:18)? They allowed their hearts to lead the way. They paid attention to the burdens placed upon their hearts. They allowed themselves to be touched by the suffering of the world. In time, their brokenness revealed what they should do, it showed the way. Trusting in the wisdom of this way, they had the courage to do something completely new and different and did not allow fear to make decisions for them.

In these challenging days, let us not be afraid to be touched by the suffering of the world. For isn’t this, too, the way of the cross? Isn’t this the way of Christ? It doesn’t mean we’re called to take on all the suffering or alleviate all the suffering of the world or save the world. That’s not our task. But we can allow ourselves to be touched by suffering, to take it in. We can listen to

our hearts, honor our hearts, see where they are breaking. In those places, these difficult places, the hurting places, we discover, maybe rediscover our humanity and begin to sense what God is asking of us, where God is calling you—and calling us, together—to take heart, have courage, and then to act in love and compassion.



¹Text and music by Jacques Berthier of the Taizé Community in France. *Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013).

²<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/03/13/world/ukraine-russia-war>.

³Augustine, *Confessions*

⁴https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/virginia-politics/the-church-is-not-the-building-it-is-our-faith-and-our-people/2015/12/26/dce43392-a41f-11e5-9c4e-be37f66848bb_story.html