

SIGNS OF LIFE - SHELTER

PSALM 25: 1 - 7

¹TO YOU, O LORD, I LIFT UP MY SOUL.
²O MY GOD, IN YOU I TRUST;
DO NOT LET ME BE PUT TO SHAME;
DO NOT LET MY ENEMIES EXULT OVER ME.
³DO NOT LET THOSE WHO WAIT FOR YOU BE
PUT TO SHAME;
LET THEM BE ASHAMED WHO ARE
WANTONLY TREACHEROUS.

⁴MAKE ME TO KNOW YOUR WAYS, O LORD;
TEACH ME YOUR PATHS.
⁵LEAD ME IN YOUR TRUTH, AND TEACH ME,
FOR YOU ARE THE GOD OF MY SALVATION;
FOR YOU I WAIT ALL DAY LONG.

⁶BE MINDFUL OF YOUR MERCY, O LORD, AND
OF YOUR STEADFAST LOVE,
FOR THEY HAVE BEEN FROM OF OLD.
⁷DO NOT REMEMBER THE SINS OF MY YOUTH
OR MY TRANSGRESSIONS;
ACCORDING TO YOUR STEADFAST LOVE
REMEMBER ME,
FOR YOUR GOODNESS' SAKE, O LORD!



PSALM 27: 1 - 5

¹THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION;
WHOM SHALL I FEAR?
THE LORD IS THE STRONGHOLD^[A] OF MY LIFE;
OF WHOM SHALL I BE AFRAID?

²WHEN EVILDOERS ASSAIL ME
TO DEVOUR MY FLESH—
MY ADVERSARIES AND FOES—
THEY SHALL STUMBLE AND FALL.

³THOUGH AN ARMY ENCAMP AGAINST ME,
MY HEART SHALL NOT FEAR;
THOUGH WAR RISE UP AGAINST ME,
YET I WILL BE CONFIDENT.

⁴ONE THING I ASKED OF THE LORD,
THAT WILL I 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.

⁵FOR 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.

Reflection:

This week we continue our Lenten series discussing the Signs of Life in our church. Our discussion this week is – Shelter. Which naturally makes us all think of our church buildings. I share with you scripture verses this week from Psalm 25 and Psalm 27. My hope is that they may bring you comfort this week as you read them.

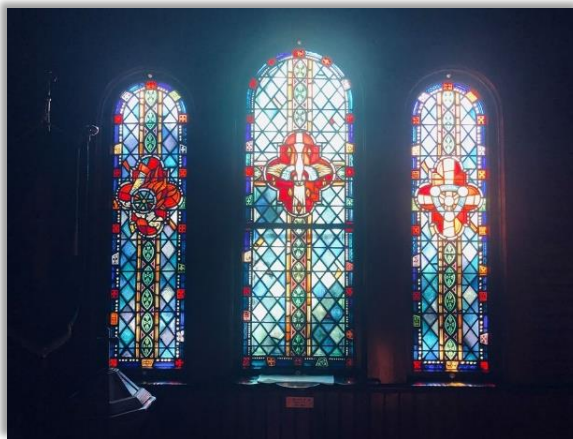
The Psalmist (thought here by many to be King David) seems to understand the only hope of edification for the soul, the only real confidant to place trust in, is God. *“To you O Lord, I lift up my soul, O my God, in you I trust.”* The poet is firmly assured that God will provide protection and escape from the enemies and troubles that assail him. Carrying him into the shelter of God’s unwavering love and mercy.

Any scholar on the Psalms will most likely tell you words used in our scripture here like “shelter,” and “tent,” are metaphoric words meant to drive the listener to the benefits of living in communion with God. A relationship with God is the confidence the psalmist relies on to withstand against his adversaries. It is a relationship with God where the psalmist seeks to hide and take shelter.

Don’t we as Christians know this? That a relationship with God is our true shelter?

Yet that doesn’t mean being without our church building is easy. It certainly does not mean they are not necessary in helping us in our relationship with God.

This week started with another hard blow to our isolation requirements. Our Governor made a tough, and I do feel the correct decision, and asked Louisiana residents to stay at home unless they have an errand that is necessary to complete (putting it lightly). I was looking forward to traveling to Morgan City and spending some time inside Trinity Church – inside that shelter – reflecting and recording our Sunday service. However, I do find it necessary for all to heed and obey the restrictions set by our government – especially us here in a state that has been hit so hard.



Probably why I received this most recent decision which such lament is that I grew up in the church. I’m a preacher’s kid and church buildings have always been open to me. Nothing and no one have ever told me to not go to them. To not enter them.

What I love to do in any church I become familiar with is locate my favorite space in the church – the place that will bring me the most comfort. At Trinity it is the LEM’s chair (don’t worry I am not going to commandeer it during services). At St. John’s it’s the small passageway in the choir loft between the organ and the old vestment room.

Growing up in my home parish in Florida, Church of the Good Shepherd - Maitland, my favorite place there was also a space in the choir loft. It was a small alcove behind the choir pews and beside the upstairs AC unit. It was a small little square area wide and big enough for us kids to lay down and stretch out during Sunday services!

During my teenage years my dad asked me if I would like to be hired as the church's Sexton. It was a wonderful opportunity for me. I always looked forward on Thursday's after school when I would clean the church to have the whole sanctuary to myself. I'd go spend time in that space and I would be with God.

You know priests try hard to remind parishioners that the "church," is not our buildings, it is us, the people. That is the truth. However, unfortunately, the message sometimes is so forceful it can sound as if priests do not believe the physical buildings matter. I assure you that no priest believes that.

When I would go to clean the church on Thursday afternoons I would open the church doors and listen to the pine ceiling boards crack and the church as it spoke back to me the echoes of my own movement – it was quite obvious the building was alive. More than that it welcomed me. The building was waiting for me. It knew me.

The truth is our buildings know us. Take a moment and think of all they know and all they have seen with us. They've sung with joy at our baptisms, our weddings. At our confirmations, Easter services, Christmas pageants, and



vacation bible schools. They've wept with us during funerals of our loved ones, on Good Fridays, and maybe even at weddings of our kids and grandkids too! They've been there to hold us when we've had no other place to go. When the world has confused us by wars, depressions, civil rights movements, terrorist attacks, and political strife. They've been there to help absorb all our fears. Our buildings know us.

And each of us good Episcopalians who refuse to leave "our," pew knows that there is one special space in our church where we rest into life of God in a special and unique way. Where we acknowledge that no secrets are hid and that God is our security and knows and loves us in all our frailty, all our weaknesses, all our failures. Our buildings know us!

As I locked the front door and left Trinity two Sundays ago, and as I spent time this past week at St. John's – it was quite clear the buildings were speaking to me that they would miss us. But even in speaking that, the buildings were there telling me they had faith in God and faith in us that we will return. And we will return!

When we do, we will cry out Amen. We will shout Alleluia! We will sing praises of joy. Some of us may even weep. And the buildings who wait for us now will greet us again in all their God given glory. And they will speak to us what they yearn to say to us now. "That all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well." Amen.

God's peace,
Fr. Stephen+