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The past few weeks we've been looking at the variety of psalms in the Bible, poetic songs that express a wide span of emotions. No matter how you feel or what you're going through in life, there's a psalm in the Bible that reflects your experience. We began a few weeks ago with the celebration of joy in Psalm 113, praising God from the early morning to night. Psalm 69 got us in touch with anger at the enemies that appear in our lives, for at times we feel up to our necks in the floods of life. Last week we experienced the apprehension of making the choice of which path to follow as expressed in Psalm 1. This morning we encounter a psalmist who strives to have trust in the midst of fear.

Ever been afraid? I recall being afraid of tornadoes when I was a child, remembering the destruction of the Palm Sunday tornado that ravaged this area in 1965, killing 137 people in Indiana and injuring 1200 others.

Others may be afraid of snakes or certain insects, the dark, swimming in water, flying on an

airplane, monsters, or speaking to a large group of people. I imagine that through the years, the focus of your fears has shifted, for as we grow older our fears change, often related to what's going on in the world around us.

I recall during my childhood years that I worried about the Vietnam War. During college the nuclear standoff with Russia seemed to be the main concern. During seminary AIDS became the topic of concern, and while serving my first congregation after seminary we felt the fear of Iraq and the Gulf War invade our lives. On September 11, 2001, our greatest fear became real when terrorists invaded our land and crashed airplanes into two towers, creating nervous shockwaves that continue to rumble even now. Ever since that terrible day, I think our nation feels more on edge, more apprehensive and fearful about our future.

It's normal to be afraid. We humans are created with a wonderful response system, often known as the "flight or fight" response that helps us respond to a threat or emergency. But sometimes we get so

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overwhelmed with all the fearful news we hear that we begin to think everyone is our enemy. During the 1950s it was the Red Scare and the Communists we feared. Now we're afraid of those from the Middle East. Centuries from now we might fear beings from other planets.

Sometimes it's hard to know whom to fear or to really know who our enemies are, as was the case with a little girl named

Anne [who] had been exceedingly naughty, and during the dinner hour she was forced to eat alone in the corner at a card table. When everyone was seated, Father bowed his head and gave thanks.

Then little Anne gravely bowed her head and said, "Thank you, dear Lord, for preparing a table before me in the presence of my enemies."<sup>1</sup>

The writer of Psalm 27 offers a list of potential enemies and fears any of us could experience: evildoers, adversaries and foes, armies set to attack him, war, abandonment by parents, and those who tell lies against him. Any of these enemies on *your* list of fears?

In the midst of the fears the psalmist recognizes, he sprinkles trust throughout his writing. Did you hear how the psalm began?

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?

Isn't that amazing? While creating a list of enemies and fears, the psalmist begins with word of trust.

Later New Testament writers echoed this same trust as they recalled Jesus' life. Matthew wrote:

Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?...Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? (Matthew 6:25-27, NRSV)

The apostle Paul wrote about all the sufferings that we endure, for he had been persecuted for his faith, and yet, he could still write to the Romans, "What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us?" (Romans 8:31 NRSV)

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Even in the list of enemies and fears, the writer of Psalm 27 suggests singing and making melody to the Lord. At the very end of the psalm, the writer celebrates the goodness of God and ends with this suggestion:

Wait for the Lord;  
be strong, and let your heart take courage;  
wait for the Lord.

Seriously? That's how you're ending this psalm, by suggesting we *wait*? I don't know about you, but when I'm afraid, I want to do something. Waiting is often not an option!

The Hebrew word **קָוָה** (kaw·vaw) in this psalm is translated 29 times as "wait" in other parts of the Bible, but another 13 times the word is translated as "look." Throughout the Bible, there is a sense of expectation with this word. Another version of the Bible translates the word as "trust," ending the psalm in this way:

Trust the LORD!  
Be brave and strong  
and trust the LORD. (CEV)

The Hebrew word doesn't suggest an impatient, frustrated waiting while wondering if anything good will happen while sitting in fear, but instead the word contains hope, an expectation that God is just around the corner. If the word can be translated as "look," then there is something to see; you're not waiting alone, for God is already on the scene.

That's something Tommy Dorsey discovered, and I'm not referring to the big band leader and trombonist, famous in the 1930s through the 50s. Instead, I'm referring to the Tommy Dorsey, who was later known as the "Father of Gospel Music," but only after going through an experience that most of us would fear.

Thomas was born in a small town in Georgia in 1899. When he was about eleven, the Dorseys moved to Atlanta where Thomas was quickly enamored with the blues and began playing piano at a vaudeville theater. Later the family moved to Chicago where he attended classes at the College of Composition and Arranging. Soon he was on stage under the name "Georgia Tom,"

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playing barrelhouse piano in one of Al Capone's Chicago speakeasies and leading jazz bands.

Thomas was converted at the National Baptist Convention in Chicago in 1921 and began writing gospel songs and trying to get them published. It was discouraging at first. He later said, "I borrowed five dollars and sent out 500 copies of my song, 'If You See My Savior,' to churches throughout the country . . . It was three years before I got a single order. I felt like going back to the blues."

He didn't, and gradually his reputation grew, and his work became known. In August 1932, while leading music in St. Louis, he was handed a telegram bearing the words, "Your wife just died." He rushed to a phone to call home, but all he could hear over the line was "Nettie is dead! Nettie is dead!" A friend drove him through the

night, and he arrived home to learn that his baby boy had also died.

"I began to feel that God had done me an injustice," Thomas later said. "I didn't want to serve Him anymore or write any more gospel songs." But the next Saturday, while alone in a friend's music room, he had a "strange feeling" inside—a sudden calm and a quiet stillness. "As my fingers began to manipulate over the keys, words began to fall in place on the melody like drops of water falling from the crevice of the rock:

Precious Lord, take my hand  
Lead me on, let me stand  
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn...<sup>2</sup>

Whom shall I fear? Wait for the Lord, who will take you by the hand and lead you to safety.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Hodgin, *1002 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking*, #233.

<sup>2</sup> Morgan, Robert J. *Then Sings My Soul Special Edition*. Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.