



Advent Reflection for Tuesday, December 7

Mark Popham

You can listen to the reading and reflection by clicking [here](#).

**Psalm 27:1-6**

*The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear?\* The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom then shall I be afraid?*

*When evildoers came upon me to eat up my flesh,\* it was they, my foes and my adversaries, who stumbled and fell.*

*Though an army should encamp against me,\* yet my heart shall not be afraid;*

*And though war should rise up against me,\* yet will I put my trust in him.*

*One thing I asked of the Lord; one thing that I seek;\* that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life;*

*To behold the fair beauty of the Lord\* and to seek him in his temple.*

One thing I've loved about the psalms since I began to regularly read the Bible again is just how conversational they are with God. A lot of the psalms are songs of praise and exultation, of course, but there seem to be an equal number where the psalmist is entreating, hectoring or occasionally outright scolding God, often in the same psalm! Just from my readings it seems not uncommon for a psalm to begin with praise for God's grace and assistance in the past only to switch very quickly to asking, not so subtly, why that grace and assistance are not currently being extended to the speaker. I never thought I would ever find the psalms hilarious, but here we are.

I guess a big part of that is because the psalms are SONGS - not just individual meditations but pieces to be performed, for both religious utility and edification as well as entertainment. The first four verses of Psalm 27 actually have kind of a boastful swagger to them, as do a lot of the psalms which deal with - as we would say now - the haters. But it was the final two verses that really caught me this year. In a beautiful contrast to the threats of evildoers, armies and war, the psalmist does not ask for physical deliverance but only to "dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life; to behold the fair beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple."

I attend the 8:30 This Little Light service with my two kids, and one of the greatest joys I've had these past few months has been to return to the interior of Holy Apostles. Being back in the church has been an incredible experience, made only more beautiful by both separation and all of the painstaking work the Mothers have done over the past year. My youngest daughter is probably a bit more interested in investigating the house of the Lord, really getting in there and crawling under the chairs and poking around as much as possible in the house of the Lord, but I can absolutely see the reverence my older daughter Isabel has for being in church, her face beaming every Sunday. Holy Apostles has always felt like a world apart from the stresses of my everyday life; of work and getting the kids to school and doing the dishes; a place of quiet contemplation - where you can behold the fair beauty of the Lord and seek him. One of my most peaceful memories, from right before the pandemic, was coming to the early Ash Wednesday service, entering the church while it was still a little dark outside and sitting in silence and contemplation before receiving ashes and then going about my day.

But the psalmist isn't just asking to dwell in the house of the Lord on Sundays, right? As much as I loved the Ash Wednesday service, wasn't the point to carry the experience with me out into the world and try to make it a bit more like Holy Apostles? I think there's a real danger for me of considering my time at church - or even the time I spend during the week praying, listening to the reflections, and reading - as a pit-stop I take to make a spiritually unsustainable life possible for one more week. I had a realization this year that, despite going to church and even integrating readings and prayer into my life to differing extents, I do not actually think about God in my everyday life very often. Coming from a fairly negative religious background, my first thought is of my failure to think of God when making decisions in my life, but probably more consequential is that I do not rely on God very much. When I am stressed or tired in the day I don't try to access God's love in any way. It's simply not integrated into my life - it doesn't come to mind. And maybe this Advent season what I need to work on is having the conversations with God that the psalmists do, to become a bit more present in my relationship, and try to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.

Mark lives with his wife Kristin and daughters Isabel and Adelaide in Kensington. They have been members at Holy Apostles since 2019.

