

TEXT: Psalm 27

THEME: AT HOME IN GOD'S LAND

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? When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, when my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall. Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident. One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple. For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock. Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me; at his tabernacle will I sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the LORD. Hear my voice when I call, O LORD; be merciful to me and answer me. My heart says of you, "Seek his face!" Your face, LORD, I will seek. Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger; you have been my helper. Do not reject me or forsake me, O God my Savior. Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me. Teach me your way, O LORD; lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors. Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes, for false witnesses rise up against me, breathing out violence. I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD. *NIV*

Dear Carol, family, and friends of our dear departed brother, Michael Florida:

In the thirteen years that I've known Mike and Carol it seems that they often had a challenge to face. There was Carol's struggle with cancer, Carol's father's final days on this earth, family challenges, and Mike's cancer. In looking back over it all, one might get a sense that there wasn't a lot to be happy or positive about much of that time. Yet through it all, there was constant "Florida Sunshine," and I'm not talking about the southern state. Through all their troubles and difficulties, Mike and Carol trusted in God and knew that God was with them, that they were in God's presence, and that made everything bearable. In fact, it made everything more than bearable for Mike and Carol, it filled them with a peace that the world cannot give or understand. It filled them with joy in the presence of God.

That's why Psalm 27 is such a fitting text for this occasion as we celebrate Mike's final victory and his welcoming into the arms of his Savior. King David, who was no stranger to challenges and difficulties in this life, begins this psalm with a triumphant assertion of God's power in his life. **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?** Two great blessings of salvation are joy and security. In the Bible, light is often a symbol of joy and happiness. In English too, we sometimes speak of a "light" mood, which I feel beautifully characterizes Mike's demeanor and personality—that "Florida Sunshine." Here the LORD, the source of our joy, is called light. Security is symbolized by calling God a stronghold under whose protection a believer is safe. No army of enemies—no cancers, challenges, issues, or setbacks—is strong enough to deprive David, Mike, or any true believer in Jesus Christ as

his or her one and only Savior from sin, of the joy and safety we have in the Lord's presence.

In Psalm 27, David continues with another verse that I feel typified Mike Florida. **One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple.** David's greatest joy did not come from his wealth or honors, but from the freedom to worship in the LORD's tabernacle. David's greatest desire is that the LORD will preserve his freedom of worship. Do you suppose that in our country, in which we enjoy so many blessings, many people would list freedom of worship as their greatest blessing, the privilege they value above all others? By the priorities he sets in this prayer, David teaches us to put first things first. Mike had learned that lesson and it served him well throughout his life. Mike was very faithful in his worship and participation of the Lord's Supper, regularly receiving the Lord's body and blood for the forgiveness of his sins and the strengthening of his faith—not because he *had* to but because he *wanted* to. Mike served as the Missions Elder of our congregation, procuring our mission festival speakers and keeping the worldwide mission of the church before our congregation. He served as president of the Central Michigan Chapter of WELS Kingdom Workers, an organization that promotes lay-people's active participation in the work of the church at home and abroad. Over this past year, the only regret, the only complaint I ever heard Mike make was that he could not be in church to worship the Lord with his brothers and sisters in the faith.

Oh, I am sure that there were other things that Mike was missing over the last year of his earthly life. Mike was an accomplished writer and story-teller, a trait that I learned runs in the family when I met several of his brothers at Mike's last birthday celebration. Mike loved to sing in church and he loved to sing Karaoke. But Mike's ability to communicate diminished with his illness. Mike loved helping people, fixing things, and building things, like shelving units for our Trinity Lutheran elementary school. But his physical strength was gone. And of course, Mike loved pizza. Almost every pizza place in town knew Mike Florida's face and voice. I know the plan is for each of us to enjoy a little bit of pizza in remembrance of Mike at the fellowship meal following this service.

Mike, like King David, knew that he was a sinner. Mike confessed his sins regularly and asked for God's grace and mercy, just as David did in Psalm 27: **Hear my voice when I call, O LORD; be merciful to me and answer me. ... Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger; ... Do not reject me or forsake me, O God my Savior.** Like David, Mike trusted in God—not himself or his own good works—for his salvation. That is why Mike was ready to lay down the burdens of this earthly life, leave his struggles behind, and go home to be with our Savior-God for all eternity.

David expressed his confidence, Mike's confidence, and the confidence of every true believer in Jesus in the final verses of Psalm 27: **I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.** Mike is AT HOME IN GOD'S LAND. That gives us our comfort today and in all the days to come. We mourn our loss but rejoice at Mike's great victory. There is a little more "Florida Sunshine" in heaven now. And with David, I am sure Mike would encourage each of us: **Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.** Remember that the Lord does all things well in his time. Amen.