

July 14, 2024  
 Pride Sunday, Part 1  
 Rev. Carrie Winebrenner

“Peek-A-Boo!”

Based on Romans 8:31-40 and Psalm 27

### Old Testament Reading Psalm 27, An Expansive Translation

Before I read this new and unconventional translation of the Psalm, I'd like to share why. Scripture offers us depictions of the Divine that resist any one category—masculine imagery of God as king or lord, feminine imagery of God as midwife or mother bird, nongendered imagery of God as rock or, as in this psalm, light and refuge. In that spirit, this translation of Psalm 27 resists the patriarchal translation of God's Holy Name as “LORD,” opting instead for “LIVING GOD.” It also replaces “he” pronouns with “they” pronouns. As we come to recognize that God is more than just male, and embrace our belief in “God as three persons, blessed trinity,” we grow toward embracing the full diversity of humanity, which altogether makes up the image of God.

So, I ask that you open your minds and your hearts for something new...something different...something beautiful. Hear now these words with fresh ears and listen for what Living God is speaking to you.

LIVING GOD is my light and my rescue.

Whom should I fear?

LIVING GOD is my life's refuge.

Whom should I dread?

When evildoers come at me to eat up my flesh—

my attackers and ill-wishers—they are the ones who stumble and fall!

Though an army should encamp against me,

my heart will not fear;

though war should rise against me,

in this will I be confident.

<sup>4</sup>One thing I have asked from LIVING GOD,

that will I seek after—

for me to dwell in the house of God

all the days of my life,

to see the beauty of God,

and to inquire in their temple.

For God shall conceal me in Their own hideout in times of trouble.  
 They tuck me away in Their own tent's secret place;  
 They set me high up on a rock.

Now my head will be lifted up  
 above my enemies encircling me;  
 therefore I will offer sacrifices of joy in their tabernacle;  
 I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the LIVING GOD.

<sup>7</sup>Hear, O God, when I cry with my voice!

Be gracious to me and answer me.

<sup>8</sup>When You said, "Seek My face,"

my heart said to You, "Your face, LIVING GOD, I will seek."

<sup>9</sup>Do not hide Your face far from me;

do not thrust Your servant away in anger;

You have been my help.

Do not leave me nor forsake me,

O God of my salvation.

When my family forsakes me, LIVING GOD takes me in.  
 Teach me your way, LIVING GOD, and lead me on a smooth path,  
 on account of those who scrutinize me!  
 Don't give me over to the will of my attackers,  
 for false witnesses and those who breathe violence  
 take their stand against me.

If I did not believe  
 that I would experience the goodness of LIVING GOD  
 in the land of the living, where would I be?  
 Hope in LIVING GOD!  
 Be strong! Let your heart take courage!  
 Hope in LIVING GOD!

This is the Word of the LIVING GOD. **Thanks be to God.**

*Let us pray. LIVING GOD, creator, redeemer, sustainer, we ask your Spirit to guide us in meditation on your word. That our hearts would be open to you, O God. That we may release every defense against your Spirit's guidance. That we would receive the wisdom you intend for us. May it be so. Amen.*

We have all done it. I can almost guarantee that we've all had it done to us, too. That sly hint of a smile, the pair of hands raising to cover eyes, only to be wrenched away with an exuberant exclamation...

As the resulting giggles commence, the cycle continues for as long as you both have the energy and the attention span.

Of course, I am speaking about Peek-A-Boo! And I must admit, I never dreamed it would be a topic in a sermon, but I mean...why not? It's a game that's been around for centuries, first noted in the late 1500s, according to the Online Etymology Dictionary.

It was even the subject of a 2014 article by the BBC, which wrote that Peekaboo is **“a game played over the world, crossing language and cultural barriers. Why is it so universal? Perhaps because it's such a powerful learning tool.”**<sup>1</sup>

While we, as grown-ups, or at least as non-toddlers, find it delightful to be in the presence of infant smiles, giggles, and gurgles, the child is also learning one of its first lessons on **object permanence**.

The Swiss developmental psychologist Jean Piaget explains that babies spend the first two years of their lives...prime peekaboo time...starting to put pieces together with what little data they can receive. Looking at it this way, peekaboo helps babies test and re-test a fundamental principle of existence: that things stick around even when you can't see them.

This idea of things existing whether we see them or not seems like a simple concept. But anyone who has ever asked, “Has anyone seen my keys?” can admit it's not always that simple. Unless you're lucky enough to have a photographic memory, things get lost.

Items we coveted in our earlier years get put in a box, sometimes never again seeing the light of day. That bag of salad that I really was going to eat this time lives in the back of the fridge well beyond its expiration date.

That friend that I used to talk to all the time...but life got in the way, and we haven't chatted in years...one of these days I'll reach out and see how they are doing. Things, people we care about fall “out of sight, out of mind” even when we know they still exist. It's not intentional; it's certainly not malicious. It just happens.

As I was reading Psalm 27 over and over this week, I found this same pattern “of being seen...losing sight...but then excitedly rediscovering” throughout the passage.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20140417-why-all-babies-love-peekaboo>

(Holding hands up by face...big smile and exaggerated expressions)

LIVING GOD is my light and my rescue.

Whom should I fear?

LIVING GOD is my life's refuge.

Whom should I dread?

(covering eyes)

<sup>7</sup>Hear, O God, when I cry with my voice!

Be gracious to me and answer me.

<sup>8</sup>When You said, "Seek My face,"

my heart said to You, "Your face, LIVING GOD, I will seek."

<sup>9</sup>Do not hide Your face far from me;

do not thrust Your servant away in anger;

You have been my help.

Do not leave me nor forsake me,

O God of my salvation.

(excitedly uncovering eyes with HUGE smile)

If I did not believe that I would experience the goodness of LIVING GOD

in the land of the living, where would I be?

Hope in LIVING GOD!

Be strong! Let your heart take courage!

Hope in LIVING GOD!

Peekaboo!

Friends, our faith journeys are the ultimate Peekaboo scenario. Some days, we have all the faith in the world, and then the next...we cover our eyes with doubts and fears, relying on ourselves instead of God...but then something shifts, something catches our attention, and Peekaboo! With a huge smile, God excitedly reminds us that God has been there the whole time, even when we couldn't see them.

That is the ultimate truth of God's love. No matter what we do, or don't do, God's love is never...never taken away.

Let me say that again for those in the back.

No matter what you do.

No matter what you don't do.

No matter who you are. What you look like. How you dress. How you move. Whom you love. God loves you.

But I get it. Sometimes, it's easier to hide our eyes with our hands than to face the one who loves us beyond all measure. Far too many times, others tell us we don't deserve that love, that we are at risk of losing it, or worse...that we never had it to begin with.

And to that, I say, "No." To that, the apostle Paul, who is credited with saying a lot of things that limit the love of God...to that, Paul says, "No."

Just a few moments ago, we heard from his letter to the church in Rome, "I'm convinced that nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord: not death or life, not angels or rulers, not present things or future things, not powers, or height or depth, or any other thing that is created."

LIVING GOD is your light and your rescue. Whom should you fear?

LIVING GOD is your life's refuge. Whom should you dread? No one.

(Pause)

But friends, I wholly admit that is a lot easier said than done, especially this morning. You see, this sermon was written as a message of hope for our LGBTIA+ siblings. It was written to remind everyone that God always loves them and us completely, unconditionally, in Agape Love.

This sermon was written before yesterday's assassination attempt. It was written before someone intended to take the life of our former president, murdered a bystander, and injured others, as well. It was written before the lives of the shooter's family were forever changed.

One of my seminary friends texted, telling me to turn on the news. I found myself on my couch, glued to the news, thoughts and feelings racing.

I thought of rewriting this message late last night, falling into the shadow of doubt and hurt.

Friends, the LGBTQIA+ community knows this shadow. Our country knows that shadow. We've been preparing for an election that brings us into that shadow. We are bombarded by news of violence, hatred, threats, and discrimination.

My heart hurts. My heart is sad. My heart is angry. I know I am not alone; I suspect yours is, too. Far too often, my prayers begin with, "What is going on? Where are you?"

(hands over eyes)

<sup>7</sup>Hear, O God, when I cry with my voice!

Be gracious to me and answer me.

<sup>8</sup>When You said, "Seek My face,"

my heart said to You, "Your face, LIVING GOD, I will seek."

<sup>9</sup>Do not hide Your face far from me;

do not thrust Your servant away in anger;

You have been my help.

Do not leave me nor forsake me,

O God of my salvation.

In times of fear, devastation, and utter shadows...cling to the object permanence that is God's love for you. Cling to the firm and certain knowledge that our faith will see us through until that shadow is lifted from our eyes and we see God's love once more shining down on all of God's beloved children.

If I did not believe that I would experience the goodness of LIVING GOD

in the land of the living, where would I be?

Hope in LIVING GOD!

Be strong! Let your heart take courage!

Hope in LIVING GOD!

Lord, have mercy. Amen.

In joyful response to God's Word proclaimed and affirming our faith in the one who created each of us with love, we now move into a prayerful space to reflect on our belovedness and interdependence with all of God's beloved children.

In your pews, you will find rainbow ribbons and blank slips of paper. While I read the poem written in our bulletins, you are invited to remember God's agape love for all and then share that with our community. Perhaps you'll find yourself writing a prayer, a poem, or words of support and encouragement.

Perhaps it's a message of honesty and empathy. Perhaps you're writing these words for others, or maybe you are writing them for you.

You can write small and fill the entire space. You can write one big word. Whatever you do, think about the peek-a-boo permanence of God's love for all, and use your faith to give that love to others.

After worship, please place your slips of paper on the large wooden table in the narthex or lay them across the front pews up front.

If you're worshipping with us online, I invite you to drop them off at the church if you're local or include them in the comments section of the attendance form. I will print them out on your behalf.

During the week, we will staple our messages of love and support onto rainbow ribbons and tie them in our courtyard as visual reminders of God's promise to always be there. Then, we will take them to the Fort Wayne Pride Fest to be distributed to those who need a colorful reminder that God loves them completely.

"The Bravest Thing We Can Do." By the Rev. Sarah Speed:

Trust your belovedness. Let it be a protest,  
an act of resistance, a song of celebration.

Trust your belovedness in a world that is rarely satisfied.

Wear it like a badge of honor.

Speak it as confidently as your last name.

Tattoo it to your heart.

When outside forces chip away at your sense of self,

when life asks you to hand over the keys,  
remember the water. Remember creation.

Remember how it was good, so very good.

Let that truth hum through your veins.

Sing it so loud that it drowns out the weariness of the world,  
for the bravest thing we can ever do is trust that we belong here.

**(allow a few more moments while Brent plays through the anthem again.)**

If I did not believe that I would experience the goodness of LIVING GOD  
in the land of the living, where would I be?

Hope in LIVING GOD!

Be strong! Let your heart take courage!

Hope in LIVING GOD!

Amen.

Friends, I invite you to rise in body or spirit as we join our voices in singing the hymn on the back of our bulletins, Impartial, Compassionate God of our Lives.

### **Pastoral Prayer and Lord's Prayer**

You are a God who leads us, who makes a way when there is no way.

We give you thanks, O Lord, for you are stronger than every foe.

We give you thanks, for your creative Spirit is always at work, making all things new.

We give you thanks, for though we feel scattered or on edge, there is no place we can go  
beyond the reach of your love.

And so we are bold to lift our voices to you, to admit our need.

We pray this day for your Church, in this community, in this nation, and in the world. We ask  
your blessing on your Church, that we may in turn be a blessing to others.

We ask your guidance, strong and sure, for we are not certain of the way forward. We pray

for the gift of discernment, and the courage to follow, even when we feel battered by the waves. Give us eyes to see and ears to hear...and feet ready to follow...and hands ready to serve.

Take from us any thought that does not glorify you, and lead us on your way.

We pray this day for the nations of this world, and for our leaders, that they too may have the gifts of discernment and courage. Give them wisdom to seek the good of all, not only some. Give them compassion, and imagination, and love.

We pray this day for your people near and far who live each day with fear.

Whether they fear someone in their home, or violence in the streets, or the government, or themselves...bring peace, O God. Bring peace to those in the midst of war, and to those whose greatest enemy is within. Bring peace that passes all understanding, peace founded on justice, for the people of Syria, and Sudan, Ukraine and Russia, Israel and Palestine, and the United States. Be with our country as we fight our fears, as we mourn civil discord and yearn desperately for a united path forward. Hold close everyone who was affected by yesterday's shooting. Lord, in your mercy.

We pray this day for those who are ill, in body, mind, or spirit.

May your healing presence surround and fill them, may your comfort enfold them. Guide the hands and minds of doctors and nurses and all who care for others, that they may understand and so treat people toward wholeness.

We pray this day for all those who find the news too much to bear—people living with stories they have not been able to tell, with hearts burdened by trauma, with lives upended by choices made by others. Shield their hearts, O God. Give them hope, and help, and a listening ear. Give us courage to hold their stories, feelings, and prayers to be a friend to those who feel alone.

You are a God who makes a way when there is no way, who creates paths in the desert and through the storm. We hope in you. We hope with our whole selves as we pray together in the words you taught us to pray...

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.**