

Lifted Heads

Psalm 27

When I was doing sermon planning for January before Christmas I chose the title for today's sermon without knowing that I would spend the two weeks before preaching it with intimate knowledge of what it is like to have trouble lifting my head. For most of the last two weeks I haven't wanted to lift my head off the pillow most of the time. Just the effort of getting up was exhausting. Until that day when the fever breaks and the aches subside and then suddenly you feel like there is something to live for again. One of the best metaphors I know for that experience is the desire to lift one's head. Do you know what I'm talking about?

Have you noticed that the way we respond to much of life is mirrored in what we do with our heads? When we feel sad or tired or sick, our heads slump. When we go to God in prayer, our heads often automatically bow. When we are proud of our accomplishments, we hold our heads high. When we are ashamed of something, our heads hang in disgrace. We lift up our heads to worship and praise. One of the things I have noticed, since we have been using the projection of music on the screen, is how much better you all sing when you're looking up. There is the experience in worship of having our lives lifted up in the presence of God that seems to make us look upward. That's why so many people raise their hands in worship. There is something about the experience of being in the presence of God that lifts our heads. That's why people used to say Christians were looking for heaven in the sky. They were always looking up when they thought about God's grace. A lifted head is the posture of praise – the posture of joy – the posture of hope.

So it should be no surprise that the psalmist asks God to lift up his head when facing trouble. **As goes the head, so goes the life, it would seem.**

I found myself experiencing this head exercise this week as I was reading the news online. Your ears may have perked up when you heard that St. Louis Park has become the 8th Minnesota city to create a Domestic Partner registry. That is a positive step forward. Then I read about the latest suicide of a Minnesota teenager – another young person

taunted mercilessly for being gay. My eyes went downward as I pondered why Minnesota seems to be the epicenter for this phenomenon of young people killing themselves as their most viable option when facing life. Then I read that an arrest had been made in the shooting of Guadalupe, the girl from our neighborhood struck in the neck by a senseless gang shooting. I thought about the event held here at our building last week where people from the neighborhood and city gathered in support of Guadalupe's family and I was grateful for progress in the case. My head instinctively lifted as this communal response was such an act of grace. Then I read the notice on the AGC Facebook page about the memorial being held this past Friday for Krissy Bates, the transgender woman stabbed in her home. My mind flashed on all of my transgender friends and the pain and fear this kind of act causes to those dear to us. My head bowed.

The Psalmist notes that there are going to be those moments in all of our lives that bow our head, that cause our shoulders to slump, that knock the wind out of our sails. When those moments occur, we know they are not the last word. We have a way to dig ourselves out of the holes the world dumps us in.

God is my light, my light and salvation. The word salvation means health and wholeness. (Our God is our light, our light and salvation. In God we trust. In God we trust.) God is that force – that strength, that power – that gives us the energy to lift up our heads after being sick, to take another step after being discouraged, to risk loving again after being disappointed. It is a strength that is as close to us as we are to ourselves. It is always available to you during those times when you need your head lifted.

Sources:

www.homileticonline.com God of the Snowflake, January 2011.