

January 25, 2026—The Third Sunday after the Epiphany
The Rev. James Wyatt

Whom then shall I fear?

On Thursday afternoon, I attended the grand opening of Poulsbo's new Recovery Café, which I will talk a little more about at our Annual Meeting this afternoon. But I bring up this event now because while I was there I had the chance to speak briefly with one of our representatives in Olympia, Greg Nance, who told me his experience of how many people he sees who are afraid — afraid of ICE, of being deported, afraid of antisemitic violence, afraid of anti-Muslim and anti-Palestinian violence, afraid of our country jumping into more wars, afraid of rising prices and stagnant wages, and so on. And I agreed with him, and I told him how my transgender daughter is visiting Canada now and my wife is trying to spend as little time as possible within the reach of our increasingly oppressive government, and how I am here—feeling called by God to be here, in this place, in this pulpit, trying to shine at least a little ray of hope to hold back the fear. And honestly, some weeks that feels harder than others.

And then the Psalm comes and smacks me upside the head with “God is my light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear?” Um, well, I just listed a handful of things that seem very reasonable to be afraid of, and really I was only scratching the surface. I could go on... Smack! Smack! “God is the strength of my life; of whom then shall I be afraid?”

Oof. OK, fine. But I have to say to David or whoever wrote this Psalm that you make it sound so easy—and it is not. I mean, it's easy enough, when you don't really have anything to fear, to smile and say the words and project a flimsy sort of positivity, but as soon as times get tough the platitudes fall flat and the fear takes hold. The reality is that it is not easy to hold on to God's light and God's salvation in the midst of our very real fears and trust God to sustain us. It is not easy to cling to that fragile sliver of hope in the face of the terror all around. No, in fact, it's hard work—and it is the work we are called to do.

It's hard work because developing that kind of trust takes practice. It is grounded in a life of discipleship and spiritual practice. The Psalmist talks about dwelling in the house of God, beholding God's fair beauty and seeking God in the temple. “You speak in my heart and say, ‘Seek my face.’ Your face, O God, will I seek.” Because seeking and *seeing* the face of God is *how we know* that God is our light and our salvation.

Seek God's face, friends, whatever that looks like for you. For me, that starts in the Daily Office, especially in Morning Prayer every day, where I am reminded again and again of Psalms like this one and God's faithfulness to us. And it continues as we gather on Sunday morning and the light of God shines in all your faces and I taste and see how gracious God is in the sacrament of bread and wine. But it doesn't end there. In our baptismal vows we promise to “seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving [our] neighbor as [ourselves]”—that's another way to seek God's face. Looking closely at our neighbors, especially the ones on the margins, is a sure way to find God's face.

You know, when I preached about finding God's face in the face of our marginalized neighbors a couple of weeks ago, two different people told me afterward that they expected me to go a step further and remind us all that seeking and serving Christ in *all persons* also means loving and serving the people we find detestable, like the ICE agents who are murdering people in the streets of Minneapolis. And they are right, and I have to admit that I'm struggling with that right now. One of our Monday guests told me her experience of being thrown to the floor by police officers who laughed at her and mocked her, and hearing the voice of Jesus remind her that the Roman soldiers treated him the same way. And so I find it much easier to see echoes of those mocking soldiers in the faces of these agents, and to see Christ in their victims. And I also realized the painful irony of these law enforcement officers operating with their faces hidden behind masks and sunglasses. They are hiding their faces from us, they do not want to be seen for who they are. And that makes it that much harder to see Christ's face in theirs, especially as they are behaving with such casual cruelty. Much harder—but no less

important. I saw a post yesterday from an Episcopalian in Minnesota, Conrad Elliot, who was “Preaching at CBP officers about justice and repentance and one started crying and had to walk to a different area... Matthew 25 is what got him,” where Jesus says “whatever you did to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did it to me.” Conrad continued, “the CBP officers down here were younger men. One cried, two were visibly shook, officers were taking turns moving away from me and the words of Jesus until the [tear] gas got to be too much for me and I had to stop. Their consciences are screaming.” Again, looking closely at our neighbors—at *all* our neighbors—is a sure way to see God’s face.

And again, this hard work of clinging to hope in the face of terror is the work we are called to do. It is nothing less than the work of the kingdom of heaven. I mean, look, we are in chapter 4 of the Gospel according to Matthew, and this is already the second time that Jesus is relocating because of the dangerous threat of a powerful tyrant. When Jesus was an infant, Matthew tells us in chapter 2, his family fled to Egypt to avoid the murderous rampage of King Herod the Great, who understood that the birth of the Messiah was a threat to his reign. And now Herod’s son Herod Antipas, arrested John the Baptist and threw him in prison, apparently prompting Jesus to return from the southeastern region of Perea where John had been baptizing people in the Jordan, back up north to Galilee. So, much like us, Jesus had some very good reasons to be afraid.

“God is my light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear? God is the strength of my life; of whom then shall I be afraid?” Jesus was cautious, he was prudent, in moving away from where John was baptizing and criticizing the tyrant king. But he knew that God’s light and God’s salvation was greater than his fear. And as soon as he settled in Capernaum he took up the same message that John proclaimed: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” What that means is that King Herod is not the one in charge. Pontius Pilate is not the one in charge. These human tyrants do not have the last word. The kingdom of heaven has come near and God is the only ruler whose power means anything.

Jesus demonstrated the power of God not by overthrowing the tyrants but by traveling throughout Galilee, “teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and sickness among the people.” Because God’s power has nothing to do with domination with oppression with coercion with terror and bloodshed and death. God is not a tyrant, not a dictator, not a vindictive king with a fragile ego. “God is my light and salvation... God is the strength of my life.” God’s kin-dom is good news, it is healing and wholeness and hope.

Here’s what Craig Loya, the Episcopal Bishop of Minnesota, posted yesterday: “The greatest danger we face right now is not the very real threat to our safety. It’s not even the erosion of democracy. The greatest threat we face as a nation is the assault being waged on hope. We must not give in to despair. We must not be consumed by the very justified anger we feel. The only way hatred can be effectively resisted is doubling down on love. The only way darkness can be defeated is light. The only way the forces of death can be overcome is by embracing, every moment of every day, God’s unstoppable life.”

“You speak in my heart and say, ‘Seek my face.’ Your face, O God, will I seek.” Thanks be to God.