

Brancepeth Sermon: The Face of God

First Sunday of Lent

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Psalm 67

Open our ears, O Lord, to hear your word.

Open our eyes to see your face.

Be gracious to us and help us,

that we might know you, love you, and serve you,

today and every day.

Amen

Today, I'm doing something a little different:

a Lenten meditation on Psalm 67.

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May God be gracious to us and bless us

and make his face to *shine* upon us.

God's face is like the *sun*,

like Spring sun, after rain;

and we are all green uncurling shoots,

our bowed heads tilting up from dark soil,

stretching out and up towards God's light, God's warmth,

and by that light and warmth drawn upwards,

and in that light and warmth

growing as we should.

God's love is like the sun,

like spring sun in the morning:

a love warm enough to grow by,

a love that shines down upon us,

shining everywhere around us,

a love that bathes us,

a love that raises us up to life.

A love that makes life, our life, all life,

life in everything we see,

quicken and pulse.

A love that *blesses*.

So that the whole world shines back

reflections of this light;

a light rainbowed across the surface of things

God's mercy is like the sun,

like spring sun, after winter,

breathing away the last scrapes of frost;

light for our darkness,

relief for our pain,

health for our sickness,

and for our loss, comfort.

God's face *is* like the sun.

The earth has yielded its increase;

God, our God, has blessed us.

May God continue to bless us.

Let the peoples praise you, O God;

let all the peoples praise you.

* * *

God's face is like the sun –

its light as indiscriminate as sunlight,

shining on everyone,

on anyone,

on all who go about under the sky.

God's light is a gift of life and growth
strewn about recklessly,
shared with abandon,
given to everyone, no matter the rank,
no matter the opinions, no matter the behaviour,
regardless of all the distinctions we make –
given to everyone under the sun.

God's love is like the sun,
shining on our enemy as strongly as on our friend;
shining on the refugee
no less than on the politician who wants to keep them out;
shining on the poor
no less than on the comfortable who think them undeserving;
shining on men and women,
on gay and straight,
on cis and trans,
on black and white,

the whole crowd shining back reflected light
a rainbow shining back from all their faces.

God's mercy is like the sun,
the sun that has no favourites,
the sun impartial, imperious,
beating down our boundaries.

God's face is like the sun.

Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,
for you judge the peoples *with equity*
and guide the nations upon earth.

Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you.

* * *

God's face is like the sun –
like the English sun,
a sun more often shining than visible,
a constant light – inconstantly seen;
an unfailing warmth – intermittently felt.

Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud,
be gracious to me and answer me!
'Come,' my heart says, 'seek his face!'
Your face, Lord, do I seek.

Do not hide your face from me. (Ps 27:7–9)

God's face is like the sun
and the sun does not hide
but we hide from the sun,
hide the sun from ourselves –
curling our heads back down to the earth.

God's face is like the sun

and in its light the earth yields its increase;

God, our God, blesses us –

but we smear the sky with smoke,

grit it with exhaust,

darken it with ignorance and neglect,

making a desert and calling it – our *standard of living*.

God's face is like the sun

but we hide our faces in the baking sand

And let our world heat like a slow oven.

God's face is like the sun,

shining on anyone and everyone,

shining with equity upon the nations,

but we make distinctions.

We decide who deserves our reflected warmth

and whom we will coldly shoulder past.

We build walls at our borders,
and succeed in shutting out the sun.

We decide who not to welcome in our churches
and succeed in keeping the sun outside the door,
and boarding up our windows,
lest the light get in.

God's face is like the sun,
shining to draw us upwards
uncurl us towards light and growth,
but we twist ourselves down
turn our faces away,
protect ourselves from blessing.

God's face *is* like the sun.

Let your way be known upon the earth,

And *judge your people* with equity.

Let the peoples praise you, O God;

let all the peoples praise you.

* * *

God's face is like the sun.

And Moses said, 'Show me your glory, I pray.'

And God said, 'I will;

I will make all my goodness pass before you,

and I will proclaim before you the name, "The Lord";

and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious,

and I will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.

But', God said, 'you cannot see my face;

for no one shall see me and live.'

God's face *is* like the sun.

And *this* face – the one that we cannot bear to see,

this face that is a danger to us,

this face from which Moses needed to be hidden

in a cleft in the rock –

this face is not a different face,

nor the face of a different god;

It is the same God, the same face.

– God's face like the sun, God's love like the sun –

but we are curled in on ourselves,

we have bound ourselves tight to our comfort,

we have bound ourselves tight to our borders,

we have bound ourselves tight to our exclusions.

We have curled up in the dark soil

with our enmities, our grudges,

our stock of carefully curated ignorance,

our willingly accepted bits of injustice.

We have made ourselves comfortable
curled up here,
safe from exposure to the world
down here in the earth,
seeds unwilling to grow.

God's face is like the sun,
but we cannot see it;
we cannot see it and live *like this*,
God will not let us live *like this*.

God's face is like the sun,
like spring sun, after rain;
and we are all green uncurling shoots,
and our bowed heads can be tilted up from the dark soil,
can be stretched out and up towards God's light,
towards God's warmth;

and we can by that light and warmth be drawn upwards,
and in that light and warmth
we *can* grow as we should.

God's face is like the sun,
God's *love* is like the sun,
God's *mercy* is like the sun,
dangerous and glorious,
a wild blessing,
a wide blessing,
a be-careful-what-you-wish-for blessing,
a Lent and Easter blessing.

May God be gracious to us and bless us

and make his face to shine upon us,

Let the peoples praise you, O God;

let all the peoples praise you. Amen