

"They'll Know by Our Love"
May 7, 2017

Psalm 23

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Hayward United Methodist Church

Call To Worship

This is a day of remembering that Christ is alive in us.

This is a day that reminds us of who we are, people of God and disciples of Jesus called to live revived lives in the world. We glorify God as one together and pray to be prepared to extend our worship into our daily lives.

Prayer of Invocation

Creating and Recreating God, we are grateful that your activity in the world is such that the old order changes to make way for the new. We who are your people come together to give thanks, for you have made us a new creation in Christ Jesus, and you still continue your transformative Easter work with us. May the proof of your presence among us in the risen Christ be evident in the energy of our praise, and in the empowering of our services. Amen.

The Word Psalm 23 Common English Bible

The LORD is my shepherd. I lack nothing. He lets me rest in grassy meadows; he leads me to restful waters; he keeps me alive.

He guides me in proper paths for the sake of his good name.

Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no danger because you are with me.

Your rod and your staff—they protect me.

You set a table for me right in front of my enemies. You bathe my head in oil; my cup is so full it spills over!

Yes, goodness and faithful love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the LORD's house as long as I live.

Living the Word

As a preteen I was given a pounded tin plaque with the 23rd Psalm on it. It hung on the wall above my bed. I was familiar with the words, but didn't have it memorized or hadn't really thought about what it meant. One day during my teen years, something happened and I was angry with my mother. I stomped up to my room, flung myself on my bed and laid there cooling down. Yet, not ready to face her again, I pouted for awhile and then got to a point where I was bored.

I began to focus on the plaque on the wall next to me and said it over and over until I knew it. Then I began to pick the verse apart, processing them one by one. In the words I found a place of safety, peace, love, hope and all kinds of good stuff for my life. Odd how things come to us when we need them...

When I was young we always said the 23rd Psalm in the 'traditional way': The King James Version. In the year 1604, because of political and religious disagreements, King James asked for a new translation that would be accurate and true to the originals. The King was looking for a single translation that the whole nation could rely on "To be read in the whole Church." He appointed fifty of the nation's finest language scholars and approved rules for carefully checking the results.

James also wanted a popular translation. He insisted that the translation use old familiar terms and names and be readable in the phrases of the day. Consider how preposterous it was to have a team of elite scholars writing for a largely illiterate public. We can only stand back in amazement at their achievement. The final product was intended primarily for public and popular consumption. It was to be read orally -- intended more to be heard in public than to be read in private.

The scholars handled technical and linguistic challenges while at the same time producing a work with a cadence, rhythm, imagery, and structure that would resonate so deeply with popular consciousness that it

shaped a civilization and culture in a unique way. History shows that they were successful in creating a translation, first published in 1611, that not only met the needs of their generation, but also succeeded in influencing the lives of generations to come.

Today, once again, the original words have been translated from the originals into many versions using the current familiar terms and phrasing of the day. On this day we read from the Common English Bible, which was translated and updated by 120 biblical scholars from 24 faith traditions. It was published in 2011, 400 years after the King James Version. That is enough time for us to update the words for today...

The all-time favorite chapter of the Bible is the 23rd Psalm. Last Tuesday when I shared some time at the nursing homes, they didn't really care what I did for a short sermon, which was a much shortened revamp of last Sunday's sermon, but when I sang the old hymns: In the Garden, How Great Thou Art and The Old Rugged Cross – which they chose; along with saying the Lord's Prayer and the KJV of the 23rd Psalm, even those who were non-responsive for the most part, mouthed some of the words. Those are the last memories to die, they stay with us almost to the end.

Traditional or updated, those words are safe, and warm and bring us home to God...they remind us that by God's grace we lack for nothing, God gives us rest, keeps us alive and shows us the way to go. When we get to the dark spots in our lives, we need not fear, for we are protected. We have so much love, goodness and mercy given us, that it overflows. The Lord's home is where the Psalmist assumes we would all like to live out our lives.

If you have experienced any of the things mentioned in this Psalm, you do want to live in God's love. There are many people that haven't made the connection between the good, the protection, the rest, and the air they breathe with the Creator. I know that sounds unbelievable. It isn't that they don't claim to know God, but they just don't connect their life and what is happening to them every moment as being done by God.

Going a little further, they discount events, big and small as connected to luck – good and bad – rather than miracles and rescues. This is deep stuff and there isn't enough time this morning to go into this deep stuff – especially because it involves the mystery of God, which is beyond all of us. So I will continue in the direction of the sermon title.

We are given the opportunity – actually it is a command from Jesus – but most of us don't like to be commanded to do things, so I will call it an opportunity...we are given an opportunity to share the gift of knowledge, the good news of God's unconditional love and life. Jesus said 'go and make disciples of all people;' 'do unto others what you would want them to do to you;' 'love God, love one another.'

It is about helping others find their way home to God. We are on the countdown to summer. Including today there are 4 Sundays left with 10am worship. The church council voted that on June 4 we will move worship to 9am, just as it was last year. Are we ready for the arrival of those who will come?

Henri Nouwen wrote this in his book Reaching Out, "Hospitality is about creating a free and friendly space where a stranger becomes a guest. Guests are made to feel at home." We often call those who come visitors. What is the difference between a guest and a visitor? A visitor is someone who stops by unexpected and takes you as you are. This is fine if they already know you, but if you are sitting in your own home possibly very casually dressed or left the dishes or cleanup for later or don't have enough food prepared for one more it could be awkward.

A guest is someone you invite and prepare for. You set a time, greet them ready at the door, are prepared to point them to clean facilities if necessary, have enough food to share. With a guest you aren't caught off guard. It is not so much what we do, but how we go about doing it. Preparing ourselves in a culture of hospitality that produces joy, smiles, fun. Hospitality with no motive, extended just because it is the right thing

to do. The goal is not to get people to return, but to mirror the loving welcome of Jesus and live it out in tangible ways.

Hospitality is more than just a warm fuzzy, it is relating to and connecting with someone. In a culture of hospitality it is every person, every Sunday intentionally making connections. But what if I can't remember their name...Ask them. People aren't offended if you just say "Help me with your name." People appreciate when you care enough to ask again.

I have put some ideas in the May Good News Letter, here is another: WEAVE - Each of us is part of God's tapestry of hospitality! Weave kindness and thoughtfulness throughout all we do as part of Christ's Church. W-welcome on a personal level; E - Empathize with others. Truly listen! A - Acknowledge the concerns and needs of those you meet; V - Verify that all needs have been addressed. E- Exit on a personal level. Have you ever thought of yourself as a bridge over which someone walks to be introduced to the light of Jesus Christ?

There has been a resurgence in the concept of 'sanctuary' as churches in border communities have been harboring immigrants from authorities. Sanctuary becomes the safe place of rest and protection for some who know the way here. Yet Sanctuary can be more than just a building or a room in a building. Sanctuary can become the place in ones soul that they find their rest, breathe safety and goodness.

Two years ago I helped make it possible for an 11 year old boy to go to horse camp for the second year in a row. His school year had gone badly because he had a temper and was suspended for fighting after several warnings. His self worth wasn't vey good. He came back from camp and shared with me that along with being with the horses, his most important take away was the song 'Sanctuary.'

If you know it sing it with me: 'Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary. Pure and holy, tried and true. With thanksgiving, I'll be a living Sanctuary for you.' What he had learned through this song was that even he could be a living sanctuary, with God, for others. Christ came to be a servant for the sake of others, in his living and in his dying. That is why we come together and share in this meal of Holy Communion - to remember how he gave of himself for others, and to remember that he called us to go into the world and do the same.

Putting others before ourselves is how we can share with them in some way the Home, the Sanctuary, that God offered to us, which leads us to the goodness of blessings that God wants for each of us in our lives. We don't have to hoard the blessings of peace that passes understanding (there is that mystery again), there is enough for all. In fact it seems to multiply as we share it.

Today is Mother's Day, When I remember my mom, I think of home. Like God, she gave me a place to be me. She didn't come after me when I needed some space on that day long ago. I know that isn't easy, I had those times with my sons when I wanted to go and heal things right away, but had to give them time to heal within themselves as well. I am so thankful for my mother and her heart for God, which she shared with me through how she lived, how she taught me how to love others.

Hospitality was one of her 'things.' She was the one who coordinated and trained the greeters at church for many years. Many Sundays she would invite a guest or two to Chicken Dinner, often foreign students from the college. I think I have shared that I often made Jell-o early on Sunday mornings and sometimes we even set the table ahead. The house was clean from the week of chores, but there was always a spot check before we left for church. She got what it meant to be prepared.

It is still Easter for 28 ½ days. June 4th is the beginning of our summer hours. It is also the day we celebrate Pentecost and the arrival of the Holy Spirit. That Spirit is already present and is encouraging you today to prepare for the guests that are coming into your life, both here and during the rest of the week. God is also preparing their hearts to receive what you offer. Who we are, what we do may make all the difference for someone. They may find for the first time the rest or peace or some other good thing that they need, because you were willing to reach out with the hand of God to them.