

Call to Worship **(Based on Psalm 16)**

You are our security, O Lord, we find refuge in You.

Everything that is good comes from You Lord!

You give me guidance and make my heart glad,

You lead me on the path of life.

In Your presence there is fullness of joy,

In Your kingdom there is fulfillment forever! Amen!

Prayer of Invocation

Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit, and we shall be created and you shall renew the face of the earth. O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy your consolations, through Christ the Lord, Amen.

The Word Psalm 23

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

² He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

³ He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴ Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

⁵ Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

Living the Word

"O Who will build the church now?" I want us to learn this song, and teach it to our children. It is as we spoke of last week, a lament to God and then taking the step to Trust that we can do great things working together with God. As a lament it is a cry to God, one that is often spoken in the church...Who will build the church now?

Older members wonder how the church will go on...the new members wonder if the task is too overwhelming for them to take on, and we look for the children as the future of the church.

They are the future, but who will build the church NOW? This song reminds us that we all have a part to do now! Have you found your part? By letting the past be the foundation on which we build, with our trust in God's strength to keep the church vital for the future, we can receive new members into this community of faith. This song can keep reminding us to faithfully stay on task. We will sing it again in the future of this community of Faith.

To build the church we need to begin with prayer. Our prayers asking God to do a new thing in this church and in this community through us. Several of us were at Stevens Point yesterday and the question was posed to us: "Do you believe that prayer makes a difference?"

The 23rd Psalm and finding a restored soul. To find something, first you have to seek after it. When something is lost you look until you find it or you eventually turn to someone to help.

During a weekend visit, a few years ago, my mother brought her laptop computer to myself and my siblings when she was having a problem, to see if any of us could help her find her start button. Somehow it wasn't anywhere on the screen anymore and she couldn't work without it. All present took a look and advised she seek 'professional help.'

Tuesday night she called me to say she took it to a guy who assured her he was a computer 'geek.' After a bit He called in his partner. She sat and watched them for two hours of fiddling and finessing, along with some disconcerting head shaking. Finally they finished with a sigh and a smile. They had found the start button.

She wasn't sure what a 'geek' was, but she had to trust enough to find the best help to restore her start... It is like that with us.

When things get out of our control, we often turn to those we trust, who may in turn direct us to those they trust. That is what the 23rd Psalm can do for us. If we turn to the scriptures for our trust, they will direct us to God. Our Creator will lead us to green pastures, and beside the still waters and restore our souls.

There is a wonderful story about Charles Laughton, the famous British actor, who was at a dinner party near the end of his career. After dinner the guests gathered in the living room.

The host called upon this great actor and orator to recite the 23rd Psalm. He said he would. By all accounts it was great, such a beautiful actor's voice. His timing and intonation were just perfect. Then they went around the room and others were invited to offer something.

There was an old woman sitting in the corner. She happened to be the aunt of the host and was staying with him. She was asked if she would recite something. She was nearly deaf so she hadn't heard what had gone before.

She stood up and started to recite the 23rd Psalm. People at first were embarrassed. It was an awkward situation to have her recite the same psalm as the great actor Charles Laughton.

There was something in the way she recited this psalm, though, that touched the hearts of those listening. When she finished, the room was quiet and everyone was truly touched. Why had this nearly deaf old woman been able to say the same words as Charles Laughton, with none of his training but with so much more power? Laughton, sensing the question, got up and said... "I know the psalm. But she knows the shepherd."

Sometime in my teen years I was given a metal plaque by one of my great Aunts, with the 23rd Psalm on it. I never could memorize things very well, but I kept reading that Psalm over and over, envisioning each of the images in my mind: the green pastures, the still waters, the valley of the shadow of death, the banquet set before me, my cup running over, and being followed by God's goodness and mercy all of my days, until I finally had it written on my heart. It helped me to know and trust the shepherd better.

I have used the King James version for us to share today, but I also want to share a more contemporary version from Eugene Peterson's book "The Message"

*1-3 GOD, my shepherd! I don't need a thing.
You have bedded me down in lush meadows,
you find me quiet pools to drink from.
True to your word, you let me catch my breath*

and send me in the right direction.

*⁴ Even when the way goes through Death Valley,
I'm not afraid when you walk at my side.
Your trusty shepherd's crook makes me feel secure.*

*⁵ You serve me a six-course dinner right in front of my enemies.
You revive my drooping head;
my cup brims with blessing.*

*⁶ Your beauty and love chase after me every day of my life.
I'm back home in the house of GOD for the rest of my life.*

The psalms help us to get to know the shepherd well enough to trust enough to let God lead. Once we can experience that trust, it becomes easier to trust again. When John Wesley hit one of those lost places in his ministry, where he thought he had lost his faith, he turned to Peter Bohler, a German-born Moravian missionary and bishop who said to John Wesley? "Preach faith until you have it, then, because you have it, you will preach faith."

I would rephrase that to say, 'practice trust in God until you have it and then because you have trust, it will come naturally to you.' Practicing trust can be supported by the hymns and psalms we have been gifted with to strengthen our beliefs.

In Baptism, Parents trust in a feeling that this will make a difference in their child's life. People join a church because they trust in a feeling that this also will make a difference in their lives. As long-time members, you keep attending because you trust a feeling that this also will make a difference in your life.

We pray because we trust that it does change things. We have seen it in our lives before. All I have to do is ask myself 'How did a dairy farm wife in Hayward, Wisconsin become a pastor. It is a long story, but the short version is that I spent a lot of time in prayer, trusting that God wanted me here for such a time as this.' That also takes trust.

If your trust in the ways that God works has wavered or failed at some point, you can begin again. Part of getting back is to not tell God what you need, instead to surrender yourself to whatever goodness God has in store for you.

Know that you can be restored. The Psalms and the hymns are there to help do that with you. They are God's goodness and mercy following you all of the days of your life.

If you haven't already done so, I invite you to read all of the psalms. Pick out your favorites, know where to go when you need to for praise or lament or trust.

Our security and guidance comes from the Lord, it was known by the writer of Psalm 16, that we used as our call to worship. "Our strength comes from the Lord." It was known by the Psalmist who wrote Psalm 121, which you will see during the offering. They want you to know it as well. They are part of the foundation that the church has been built on, until now.

Sharing and reflection on the Psalms and hymns and their stories, give us new insights into what God might have in store for us. We don't know who or what circumstances brought the psalmists to their writings, but through their words we can sense a great trust and faith in their Lord. By sharing the hymn stories, we hear how the words come in differing circumstances, but always from a higher power than just the writer.

I know I've said this before, yet, just as Charles Wesley, with his understandings of his day, over 300 years ago, could never in his wildest imagination know that his hymn, 'Hark the Herald Angels Sing' would someday be playing through huge electronic speakers in shopping Malls as Christmas, most of the writers had no idea that their work would last so long and influence so many people.

He Leadeth Me: Written by Joseph Gilmore who also recorded this in his journal: "As a young man who recently had been graduated from Brown University and Newton Theological Institution, I was supplying for a couple of Sundays the pulpit of the First Baptist Church in Philadelphia.

At the mid-week service, on the 26th of March 1862, I set out to give the people an [explanation] of the Twenty-third Psalm, which I had given before on three or four occasions, but this time I did not get further than the words "He leadeth me." Those words took hold of me as they had never done before, and I saw them in a significance and wondrous beauty of which I had never dreamed.

It was the darkest hour of the Civil War, I did not refer to that fact – that is, I don't think I did – but it may subconsciously have led me to realize that God's leadership is the one significant fact in human experience, that it makes no difference how we are led, or [where] we are lead, so long as we are sure God is leading us.

At the close of the meeting a few of us in the parlor of my host, good Deacon Wattson, kept on talking about the thought which I had emphasized; and then and there, on a blank page of the brief from which I had intended to speak, I penciled the hymn, talking and writing at the same time, then handed it to my wife and thought no more about it.

She sent it to *The Watchman and Reflector*, a paper published in Boston, where it was first printed. I did not know until 1865 (three years later) that my hymn had been set to music by William Bradbury. I went to Rochester to preach as a candidate before the Second Baptist Church. Going into their chapel on arrival in the city, I picked up a hymnal to see what they were singing, and opened it at my own hymn, "He Leadeth Me."

We will sing this hymn together #128 – in the hymnal or on the screen.