

Pastor Jon's October 11 Sermon

Text: Psalm 23 and Philippians 4.

In my sermon today, I want to address two things that really comforted me and challenged me in our readings this week. I will be focusing on Psalm 23, in particular the phrase, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies" and Philippians 4:5-6, "Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near."

As a pastor and a parent, it has been a difficult year... leading a church through a pandemic, navigating countless decisions with our family, and preaching sermons during an election year.

The pandemic speaks for itself. It has disrupted lives and the ways we prefer to go about our business. People haven't been able to honor life passages as they had hoped. Marriages have been delayed and/or greatly reduced in size (not a bad thing). Baptisms have been scheduled and re-scheduled. Funerals and Memorials are either at gravesides or have been delayed.

At home, we try to make informed decisions about school and activities... but always have an added layer of stress hanging over us and wondering if we are doing the right thing? But on a positive note - my Son, Eli, got his driver's license this week. This has been a joy for him. He ordered seat covers for "his" car and put a bigfoot air freshener in it.

At church, several of our members have contracted corona virus or know someone close to them who has or had it. It is scary stuff. Our confirmation kids expressed this week their hope that this pandemic ends soon...they miss their friends, family, and the social interactions. They are tired of wearing masks. They want things to go back to normal.

In Psalm 23, we are drawn into the metaphor that the Lord is our Shepherd. A good shepherd would provide everything the sheep needed... food, water, shelter, a place to lie down and protection from enemies. With the Lord as our shepherd, we literally lack nothing. Even when life takes us through the

valley of the shadow of death. We shall fear no evil, for the Lord is with us. His rod and staff they comfort us. This psalm is about trusting God to provide during uncertain times.

And we know that just as God desires food, water, shelter, and protection for everyone, it isn't always the case. People are hungry, losing jobs, struggling to make ends meet. I see a justice component in this Psalm that as people of God, we need to see and hear when the basic needs of our neighbors aren't being met. We are called as followers of the shepherd to seek justice and provide for the needs of those who are struggling. This is the hard part, because you need to be in a relationship with those who are hurting in order to know their needs.

But the line that really spoke to me this week, that I normally pass over is, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies." Think about it, God still provides for us even in the midst of our enemies. Right now a big enemy we are facing is Covid-19. For some, your enemy may be those who you differ with politically. Satan is our enemy who is constantly trying to draw us away from God and others. And yet, the Lord sets a table for us even in the midst of our enemies. Most of us still eat well. Grocery stores are open. Restaurants offer take-out. We have clean water to drink thanks to the cities we live. We have shelter.

In this Psalm, the Israelites would think of God's provision for them in the wilderness when they were fleeing slavery from the Egyptians in the book of Exodus. God provided water from a rock, manna from heaven. And yes, they complained to God, and God still provided. So how can we see the blessings in our lives and God's provision even during a pandemic?

Then in our Philippians lesson the Apostle Paul, writing from Prison, is addressing the Philippian church to encourage two women, Euodia and Synteché, to get along... there was conflict in the church. Paul is calling the members of the church to help these women figure it out and be of the same mind that is in Christ Jesus. Let's say hypothetically that Euodia was a

republican and Synteché was a democrat. Can they still be a part of the same church? Well, if Jews and Gentiles could navigate their differences in the church, we can too. Political or theological differences do not outweigh the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord and the one baptism we share.

Paul commands the church, even in the midst of differences to “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.” Let your gentleness be known to everyone. This means to be kind or gracious to one another. A member in our Bible Study came right out and said, “I haven’t shown gentleness to others lately.”

Then Paul commands the church not to worry about anything. Yeah right. How many of you are worrying about a lot of things right now? But Paul gives an alternative to worry. “But in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Paul doesn’t leave us hanging in our worries. He wants followers of Jesus to turn our worries into prayers. And to do it in a spirit of thanksgiving. When you do this Paul says, “And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

How can we rejoice at such a time? How can we follow the command not to worry? We can count our blessings and pray.

The good news comes through our faith in Jesus Christ. Paul didn’t know if he would get out of prison or even live. But he did have his faith in Jesus Christ. He knew his future was secure through Jesus work on the cross and his resurrection. Paul knew whether he lived or died that he belonged to the Lord. He encouraged his the church to think like him. He told his followers to think on whatever is honorable, just, pleasing, and commendable to God

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we have reason to rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice.

Amen