

Pastor Jon's Sermon from July 17/18, 2021

Psalm 23 "Thankfulness"

I am so thankful to live where we do. I thank God daily for our home. We live on Doty Island by Doty Park. We can see Lake Winnebago from our windows. I am excited that new tennis, pickle ball, and basketball courts are being built near us. But lately, I have really been enjoying putting my kayak in at Doty Park and fishing for walleye by the lighthouse. I caught my first limit of walleye last week. I couldn't believe it. I came home giddy. I give thanks to the Lord for providing right outside our front door.

Psalm 23 is a Psalm of David about God as our shepherd. It is an individual's prayer of trust in God to provide and care for him through the ups and downs of life. In this case, the Psalmist just came through a dark time... filled with valleys and enemies pursuing him. He wrote these words from the hillside looking back, realizing that the Lord was with him the whole time. "I shall fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and staff they comfort me." As difficult as this last year has been, this Psalm gives me comfort of that God is with us in good times and in bad.

I heard this week that Psalm 23 is like a love letter to God. If you could write a love letter to God, what would you write? What things are you thankful to God for? Turn to a neighbor or someone you came with and tell them what you are thankful for.

Psalm 23 is filled with thanksgiving and praise to God, the shepherd, for providing things like food, water, a safe place to lie down, and rest for his weary soul. With the Lord as our shepherd, we lack nothing. All of the writer's needs were met. I wish we could all live this way, where we are thankful, and where we lack for nothing... that everyone's needs are met. But because of sin in our world many people are still in need.

The psalmist obviously came through a tough time, one that is described as the darkest valley, or the valley of the shadow of death.

We know the valley of the shadow of death in our own lives... right? We all have something we are dealing with that brings us down or consumes our thoughts or energy. A relationship breaking up, a new diagnosis, a profound grief after the death of loved one, a worry in your family. It could be anything.

But in this text, I see a God, as our divine shepherd who journeys with us... who wants us to find rest for our souls... to have respite from our worries and concerns. The line, "He makes me lie down in green pastures" speaks to this. For a sheep to lie down and rest is nothing short of a miracle. Sheep are skittish animals... they always have their guard up because they have no way to protect themselves. They need a shepherd to guide them protect them. They are vulnerable. So imagine with the Lord as our shepherd, we are guided to places of rest and peace.

Jesus says in Matthew 11:28, come to me all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Just like in our Gospel for today, Jesus invites his disciples to a deserted place for find rest. Even though they were interrupted by the needs of the crowds, Jesus still values rest for our bodies and souls.

I feel God wants everyone to be fed enough and loved enough that they can sleep well at night. When our basic needs are met, we can rest better.

Today, our Good Shepherd offers us peace for our weary souls. In the word and communion, we are promised forgiveness and wholeness. For our anxieties, Jesus promises to journey with us in our own valleys of the shadow. The cross says that Jesus is with us especially when things don't go well.

Amen!

