

Sermon Outline

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Psalm 23 Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow-Part III

Fifth week of Easter

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Grace Lutheran Church and School

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Psalm 23:The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION: Let us pray: Like newborn infants, our hungry spirits long to be fed. And like a loving parent, O God, you nourish us with your mercy and your grace. Open our hearts to the goodness of your word. Amen.

Thank you for joining us this morning message. Last week, I shared with you that Psalm 23 is: One of the many famous Psalms in both in Judaism and Christianity. Psalm 23 is also read during a funeral or burial service. I also shared with you that while this Psalm has many applications and touches on death and human suffering however, *it is not primarily* about death. However, there is nothing wrong with having this text at funerals or memorial services, but it is more than talking about end of life.

This Psalm is about *being utterly dependent on God; furthermore, Psalm 23 conveys hope from a loving, caring God.* Moreover, Psalm 23 conveys a message of God's Grace and comfort to those who have lost a loved one. However, this morning I would like to continue the conversation on how this Psalm has a more significant impact on our lives when we are going through life's journey.

The words in Psalm 23 provide for us comfort and assurances that God is always caring for us; likewise, as a good shepherd cares for his or her flock of sheep . I also highlighted to you that Psalm 23 was written on behalf and in honor of King David. Let us continue our conversation on Psalm 23.

"My cup overflows."

The Psalmist lived with a spirit of gratitude; he or she understood that all that they had received in life was given to them from God. Therefore, the Psalmist was blessed by a giver, the giver is God. The author of Psalm 23 was also aware that life was a gift from God. This gift from God was given because God loved his creation; we are God's creation.

The Psalmist understood that their life was overflowing since God had blessed their lives. The writer of the psalm was living with thanksgiving by the virtue that God was the giver of life. Consequently, the Psalmist embraces life as a gift from God.

This reminds me of a story I read about a woman who had the habit of writing "Thank You" on the bottom of her check for each bill she paid. She lived with gratitude! She was grateful that she had electricity, water, along with her taxes. She paid her personal obligations with thanksgiving since, she was receiving numerous services. For example, services from her fire department, the police department, and sanitation services. Some people are just crabby people they live as if the world owes them something; they live with an entitlement mentality.

They complain about everything in life; they even complain about the four yearly seasons: when its winter, they complain that it us too cold. When its summer they complain that it is hot. When its spring, they complain about the pollen. When it is autumn, they complain because of the leaves on the trees are falling to the ground.

When the sun is out, they complain when the moon retires, they protest when the sun rises. These individuals are known as professional complainers; they never find joy nor contentment with life. They even complain about themselves. I invite you to stop being a complainer and embrace the wonders of life, along with the little things God has in store for you.

The author continues by watching a thunderstorm and does not respond as most people would by worrying that the rain will flood his granary or turn the roads muddy. The Psalmist sees the storm as a manifestation of the awesome power and glory of God.

Listen to Psalm 29: "The voice of the Lord echoes over the oceans.

The glorious Lord God thunders above the roar of the raging sea, and his voice is mighty and marvelous. The voice of the Lord destroys the cedar trees. The Lord shatters cedars on Mount Lebanon. God makes Mount Lebanon skip like a calf and Mount Hermon jump like a wild ox. The voice of the Lord makes lightning flash."

One person sees the rain as a blessing while another sees it as a nuisance because their hearts tell their eyes how to interpret it. If gratitude is so essential and beneficial for us to be happy about our lives, why is it hard for so many people to cultivate the habit of feeling grateful and living with gratitude. Maybe, they have a sense of entitlement – they are never satisfied. Then some people have trouble feeling grateful, people who cannot bring themselves to utter the word **"Thank you,"** because they need to feel self-sufficient. They need nothing from anybody. I can take care of myself; I am all-powerful. My dear friends, the time will come when you will, need the help of someone.

This Psalmist did not have a life free from pain and problems. She or he had to confront various enemies. The Psalmist knew the feeling of finding himself/herself in the valley of the shadow of death. He or she can praise also to thank God for all that God has done for him/her. Life has not been easy, precisely because life had often been difficult and challenging, and God has seen him/her through the hard times.

Beloved in the Lord once we learned to see our lives as the accumulation of gifts that God has given us, gifts we could not have acquired by our efforts, once we have learned to appreciate what we have, rather than complain that we don't have more, ***because we could have had nothing.***

In response to God's Greatness, we: We give thanks to God. We become a blessing for others. God continues to bless us. Our cup is running over. God's blessing will always overflow. Our cup runneth over. God gives us more than we can ever repay. God's blessing is always overflowing.

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long."

Some people need to be chasing God's blessing. Instead of having God's blessing come to us. And at times, we are just running away from God's blessing. God wants to bless us. All we need to do is stop striving, relax, and say to yourself, and I feel good about who I am. I am blessed by God. We cannot choose our generic self-determination; however, we choose to love ourselves and others.

The writer of the psalm has been in a dark valley in the past but, learns that they are not alone in the darkest valley. God accompanied the person, and the person has found a way out of the dark valley.

"I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long." What does it mean to dwell in the house of the Lord? The best way I know how to respond to the question is a story a good rabbi friend of mine shared with me a Hassidic tale while I was studying at the Jewish Theological Seminary: A rabbi hired a horse and carriage to take him to a

neighboring village. The carriage was making its way along a road with fruit trees and orchards on either side. At one point, the coachman stopped by the side of the road, and told his passenger; I am going to climb over the fence and steal some of that fruit. You sit here and keep an eye out for anyone coming. Let me know if anyone sees me." He had just crossed the fence when the rabbi called out, "someone's watching!"

The driver jumped back into his wagon, drove a bit farther, stopped, and said, "I am going to try again. Make sure I'm not being seen." Once again, as soon as he crossed the fence, the rabbi called out, "Someone's watching!" The driver was puzzled. He said I do not see another human being for miles. But every time I try to grab some fruit, you tell me if someone is watching. What's going on?" ***The rabbi pointed heavenward*** and said, "**Someone is watching.**"

For the author of the Twenty-third Psalm, dwelling in God's house, is having the sense that every moment of his or her day is being lived under God's caring, watchful eye. The Psalmist is communicating that we are being invited by God to enter His house; this is about entering into a relationship with God twenty-four seven. God's invitation to come into his presence is not top-down, it is about fellowship and community. God is the host; we are the guest. We are being invited into a relationship with a loving God.

Dear sisters and brothers, we are living in a challenging time, our present journey is a new journey for us. There is much fear in our world today, especially here in New York; there are many vulnerability and uncertainty. God is not telling us that nothing terrible will ever happen to us. What we do know is that God is telling us that **we need not be afraid of the future**, no matter what it brings us. God cannot protect us from illness, virus, or natural disasters. However, God promises us **that we will not be alone when we walk through the darkest valley.**

Furthermore, God will give us the resources to overcome all our fears and life's challenges. We will not be afraid by the virtue that the God who invites us to be in a relationship will accompany us. Amen.

RESPONSE TO THE WORD:

Let us pray: Keeper of our souls when we go astray, help us return to you, Shepherd and guardian. May the words we have heard resonate within us here at Grace Lutheran Church and School, like a drum in the valley, and may its echo never fade. Amen.