

Pastor Jordan Gades, 10-11-20 – Psalm 23, Matt 22:1-14

Grace and Peace be to you from God our father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Another week has passed, and it still feels like we are in some sort of twilight. You ever wake up and realize it's Wednesday and you still have half the week to go and everything looks dreary. I feel as I've woken up to it being that type of Wednesday every day for 6 months now. Everyday has come with another reason to pray. This week I prayed for our president. I prayed for every one of the people in Aitkin County, in Minnesota, in the united states, around the entire world who is suffering from this virus that haunts us. I do not aim to be political today. That may come as a surprise because when I said president I'm sure most of you already have a strong view point about that subject. And to each there own. My question becomes how does the death of 214,000 of our neighbors and brothers and sisters not stir us, not drive us away from the death we know in division, but rather drive us into the arms of Christ? These arms which unite us, this family which supports each other, this Spirit which makes us one in power and love of our God.

Plagues have happened generation after generation. The black plague killed, at a conservative estimate 100 million throughout Asia and Europe. Small pox killed, in just the 20th century, the century where we figured out how to eradicate it, upwards of 300 million people. Polio killed 2000 people a year in the us, not to mention the paralyzed on top of that.

A killer virus is nothing new and yet we are all in hysterics. And none of us know what to do next. And I'm right there with you all in that boat. So, what are we to do? What are we supposed to do went nothing makes sense anymore? What and we supposed to do when we are getting told different things by different people every single minute. What are we supposed to do?

I don't suppose my answer is going to be a surprise but I beg of you, I plead to you, I ask this of you with every fiber of my being; bring that fear, bring that pain, bring that confusion, bring all that you are and all that you have to God and lay it at his feet.

Trust God. Trust and have hope. Trust and have faith. Trust God and love you neighbor. Love ALL your neighbors. Even the ones you disagree with. Especially the ones you disagree with. In the arms of our God there is no separation. In your neighbor, the Holy Spirit lives and is working, in your neighbor and in every person on this planet, there is a soul worth caring for, lifting up, and loving. That is how our God views us.

Today we heard from the 23rd psalm. One of, if not the most well know bible verses by large.

The Lord *is* my shepherd;

I shall not want.

2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures;

He leads me beside the still waters.

3 He restores my soul;

He leads 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 You *are* with me;

Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
My cup runs 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 Forever.

There is something hidden in these words that escapes us because of where we are and how we think of the world. We hear these words and they reach into and give life to the living hope that is within us but they can do so much more.

I'll never forget this and I think about this every time I read this psalm now.

So, we have lived our entire lives in Minnesota for the most of us here. That probably applies to you. It applies to me for sure. And when we read this psalm with its imagery we see something. Something like this right?

Green Pic - hat makes sense that is what a nice lush summer day looks like for us. No brown, no burn, everything full of life. Everything is perfect, idyllic.

And when we hear still waters I bet more than a few of you can just look out your window and see some still waters. So, is Psalm 23 really just taking about Minnesota for 3 months of the year? Unfortunately, no.

Psalm 23 is being written and told to a people who understand the world slightly differently than we do.

Let's see Psalm 23's Green Pastures shall we.

Desert Pic - this is a picture from Northern Israel - a picture of a shepherd and his flock. Only there isn't much green, only a few patches here and there. So how is this the green pastures that we are being led to?

With the beginning of this psalm we proclaim God our shepherd. The shepherds of the deserts of Israel must lead their flock from one green valley to the next. They must always keep them moving. These are valleys to stop and pen in the sheep for the rest of their lives. These are valley's that provide what is needed for the survival of the sheep, but really only that. Every few feet another mouth full. And if these sheep were to stop they would run out of food and die. And so, they must trust the shepherd to guide them. They must rely on their shepherd to lead them from valley to valley and know that they are being taken care of, even when it seems like there isn't enough right in front them. They must Follow their shepherd, even when the way is hard because that way leads to Life.

Such great hope and faith these brave sheep must have, but they know they are being led by their good shepherd. There shepherd who seeks and saves the lost, who lays down his life for the sheep. This is a Shepherd worth having hope in.

Hope when we walk in the shadow of the valley of Death. Hope when it seems like we are surrounded by enemies. Hope when all we see should having us calling for despair. This is the hope we know right now. This is our god walking beside us, this is our God who sits with us now.

We are following our God because our God is a Grace. Grace for us, grace for our neighbors, grace for our enemies. And it's out of that Grace from our present God that we hope for today, tomorrow, and all days yet to come. Amen.