



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

A Devotion for Families or Individuals during this Time of the Coronavirus Pandemic March 22, 2020

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Assurance amidst the “New Normal”

Psalm 23

King James Version (KJV)

¹The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

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

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

⁴Yea, 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.

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

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

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

23:1 The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

23:2 He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;

23:3 he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

23:4 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.

23:5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with

oil; my cup overflows.

23:6 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.

It is amazing how the word of God has the power to speak to us and how it seems tailor-made to our present situation. Psalm 23 is one of the scriptures of the lectionary for this Sunday and week. (The lectionary is a calendar of scriptures used for worship and study by many churches.) This psalm is perhaps the best known, most loved, most often quoted, recited, and requested of the psalms as well as passages of the bible. Whether one attends church service and church school every Sunday or has rarely ever participated in either, chances are strong that there is familiarity with this beautiful passage of comfort and assurance.

Familiarity has a way of nurturing comfort: a familiar sound, a familiar smell, a familiar psalm. These last few days have been many things; familiar is not one of them. People have not described the last few days as “familiar”; they have used words like “unprecedented”, “strange”, “critical”, “stressful”, “uncertain”, “apocalyptic”, but not “familiar.” Folk pronounce and proclaim that life as we have known it has changed, perhaps having changed for good. Others suggest that this or something to follow will have to be our “new normal.” There is not much comfort in words like “change”, “uncertain”, or even “new normal.”

In the midst of coronavirus updates, hand washing videos, updates about a crashed global economy, and rumors of impending quarantines, we encounter one of the texts of the lectionary. The words are familiar to our ears. We recite in rote; but, at this time we must say and feel and believe and hear “by and with heart.” As we look for effective, competent, and ethical leadership in this time of health, social, and economic crisis, the words come, “The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want...” Those who are wondering what they should do, the words come, “he leads me beside still waters...” To the stressed, the sick, the weary, the words come, “he restores my soul...” To those on the frontlines, the first responders, the healthcare professionals, even those who have tested positive or now are sick and quarantined, the psalmists familiar words come, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil...”. To the family whose loved one will not have the homegoing celebration that they deserved, may they hear the words, “for you are with me; your rod and your staff-- they comfort me...” To the abused who cannot find safe distance from harm or threat to health because the abuser shelters in place with them, the words come, “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies...,” giving them strength and courage to hold on and not despair. To that young person who laments that there may not be a cap or gown or cheers for their accomplishment, may they find affirmation and purpose in the familiar words, “you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows...”. And when the walls seem to be closing in and the loneliness or anxiety or boredom or noise seem to simply be too much, may these familiar words break through it all and give us assurance, “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.”

We have a shepherd. We are cared for and protected. We are safe and we are loved.

TALK: Reflect on and honestly name those familiar things that you miss or have started to miss during this time of change and uncertainty.

Read again or recite Psalm 23 individually or together.

PRAY: "The Lord is My Shepherd" Prayer - A Prayer from Psalm 23

By Debbie McDaniel

Dear God,

Thank you that you are our good Shepherd and we can trust you with our lives. Thank you for your leadership and Sovereignty. Thank you for your guidance and care in all our days. Thank you that you restore our souls, give us peace, and bring us hope in all of our tomorrows. Thank you for your protection and strength that surrounds us like a shield. Thank you that we never have to fear. Thank you for your goodness and love that follows after us, chases us, even when we are unaware. Thank you Lord, that you are trustworthy and able, that you are our Refuge and hope.

In You alone is rest and peace. We praise you for the assurance that we will dwell with you forever.

In Jesus' Name,

AMEN

ACT: Take the Psalm 23 challenge from now until the Pandemic is declared to be over. Make a video of you reciting, reading, singing, signing Psalm 23. Post the video on social media or sent via email (You can post it on the Facebook page of the AME Church Department of Christian Education or emailed to cedoffice@ameced.com). Share it widely. Let's flood our networks with these familiar words that have brought and can bring comfort and assurance to many. #Psalm23 #IamAME #AMECED #FamiliarAssurance #MyShepherd



Physical space—You may wish to create a dedicated space for your time of devotion. You may choose to place a candle, bible, and special symbols or material/fabric to help you focus and center during this time of reflection and prayer.

If you use this meditation and exercise in a time of family or group devotion, share in the leadership; allow different persons to read or lead different parts of this meditation.

The Christian Education Department, AMEC Publishing House, and others will continue to develop resources that can be used as times of personal and collective devotion and study during this pandemic to help us all sustain and strengthen our faith and resolve.