

Welcome and Announcements

Worship instructions are included in italics.

Prelude – Holy Bible, Book Divine played by Austin Wachsmuth (*music will be posted as videos on the Ashland Presbyterian Facebook Page, and Kerra will play the recording during our live feed*)

Opening Prayer:

Everlasting God, in whom we live and move and have our being: You have made us for yourself, so that our hearts are restless until they rest in you. Give us purity of heart and strength of purpose, that no selfish passion may hinder us from knowing your will, no weakness keep us from doing it; that in your light we may see light clearly, and in your service find perfect freedom; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Brief silence

Amen.

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Hymn “Now Thank We All Our God”

1. Now thank we all our God
With heart and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things hath done,
In whom His world rejoices;
Who, from our mother’s arms,
Hath blest us on our way
With countless gifts of love,
And still is ours today.

2. O may this bounteous God
Thro’ all our lives be near us,
With ever joyful hearts
And blessed peace to cheer us;
And keep us in His grace,
And guide us when perplexed,
And free us from all ills
In this world and the next.

Scripture Reading –

Psalm 23 – King James Version

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 for ever.

Psalm 23 – New Revised Standard Version

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

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

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

⁴Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me;
your rod and your staff— they comfort me.

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

⁶Surely 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.

John 10:11

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

Reflection - Pastor Kerra:

The 23rd Psalm is one of the most familiar ones. I was not part of a Bible-verse memorizing church growing up, but this is one of the few passages I can say by heart. It has become part of my evening meditations the past few days, and rather than it just being “words that I know” I’m trying to let it become a prayer I am praying. Is it more than just what I can “say” by heart... could it become the voice of my heart?

It’s often a “funeral” psalm, a prayer prayed in times of distress or grief, and that makes sense. It reminds us of how we can turn to the Lord in times of trouble, and find consolation. Let’s take it line by line with thoughts and questions for reflection.

If you are using this worship guide at home, you can talk with someone about the 23rd Psalm using these verse by verse mini-meditations, or use them for your own connection to this Psalm through personal meditation. And if you are watching the Facebook Live feed – you can comment in the sidebar with your own thoughts as you listen to my reflections.

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

When I first learned this as a kid, I wondered what “I shall not want” meant. Want what? Does it mean that I quit wanting stuff? Because I could say it many times over – and still want a lot.

In this time of limits being put on how we live in community for the good of others, it’s easy to discover the things that we want, but cannot have. (or at least shouldn’t be having)

I’m finding out that I can get grumpy – under limits. But we live as limited human beings, every single day. We aren’t limitless, and those who are living as though they are limitless are the ones who are endangering others – from those who still want to “party as if they are on Spring Break” to those politicians that used their foreknowledge of this event for personal financial gain.

But as I learned more about this verse and its connection to first part of the verse, “the Lord is my Shepherd,” it also means that the Lord will provide for us what we need. (*without hoarding, if we are inclined to see the community as a whole) I shall not want also means that I “want for nothing” – my needs are met by the Lord. I think that deserves some thought to keep that from becoming distorted by letting it mean things like: The Lord takes care of “good people” or “his people,” or that the injustice that we absolutely see in times of crisis is “their own fault.”

It means that God has provided not ONLY FOR ME, but for US. How do we recognize that by not wanting more? How do we adjust for that when we see those who don’t even have all that they need?

There's the possibility of a very LONG sermon in there on that verse alone. Remember that this is a prayer, not a theological argument on what constitutes God's providence. We are praying "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." That's a really good prayer of reassurance to take stock of what we do have in a time of limits. We might see blessings we weren't even aware of in our "normal lives."

How do you see God adjusting your wants and needs during this time? Write a few of your thoughts down for posterity. I guarantee people will one day ask, What was your life like in 2020?

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

What is it about being in the natural world that offers us hope?

Is it remembering that the earth provides – food, water, air, beauty, wonder, amazement?

God MAKES me get outside. God LEADS me to water.

That's a good way to get praying – notice Spring as it begins to bloom.

When you are outside – in your yard, on your porch, taking a walk – what do your eyes notice?

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

How odd would it be if we come to think of this mandated seclusion as a time of soul restoration?

Perhaps it can be – an extended Sabbath, an extended Lent, a time to get to know your family better, or a time to make more of those phone calls to your far-flung friends to tell them what they mean to you. Will it truly focus where you WANT to be when this time of physical distancing is over?

What about those right paths? What are we doing now "for God's sake," "for our neighbor's sake?" It will become glaringly obvious what the right paths and wrong paths are, I think in the days and weeks to come. It will be "apocalyptic" in the uncovering of all that has been broken and needs fixing so that we can rebuild community trust and concern.

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.

Sometimes you can ask the internet and get some pretty great answers. I asked, “What is the shepherd’s rod and staff used for?” and got an answer from Quora. The rod is used to take care of predators and nudge misbehaving sheep back in line, and the staff is used to free sheep who get tangled up in the bushes or lift them out of the water if they go in too far. That description is the best. It’s a rather apt description for how I pray that the Lord might deal with humankind. I pray that God’s interaction with the world might be to dissuade predators, nudge those who are making mistakes, and that God might be a source of rescue.

When we see God in that way, we can have less fear of evil in the world and perhaps be nudged to do more of those things ourselves – by confronting injustice and acting with mercy.

How are you dealing with your own fear? What are your prayers to God in this time of being afraid of an invisible virus and those who would exploit it for their own gain? What are you doing to calm the fear of others?

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

In this season of great unknowns, I find this verse particularly helpful. It is a reminder that when our world is in disarray and the enemies feel so very close, keep God even closer. We are at a table with our enemies, and yet, miracles continue to occur. God continues to bless us, to anoint us to be so close to use as to touch us on the head and fill our cup with bounty. That’s worth a few moments of reflection.

I know you can count the enemies. Where are you noticing God’s grace?

My theology mentor had a mantra. He said it in a thousand different ways, and it was one of his pupils who condensed the Ottati knowledge into a memorable way of understanding it: **Life is hard, sometimes very hard, but grace abounds.** It’s the essence of this line of the prayer.

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.

This prayer, a funeral prayer, a times of distress prayer closes with an amazing amount of hope. Hope we will need for such a time as this. SURELY, in the sure and certain hope, 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 may feel as though we are spending endless days in our own homes, what if that home is also where God is making God's home? Where are you dwelling? Is God in your dwelling place? That's also the promise in the final word, the book of Revelation, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more. Mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away."

He Leadeth Me

1. He leadeth me! O blessed tho't!
O words with heav'nly comfort fraught!
What-e'er I do, Where-e'er I be,
Still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me!

Refrain

*He Leadeth me, he leadeth me,
By His own hand he leadeth me:
His faithful foll'wer I would be,
For by his hand he leadeth me.*

2. Lord, I would clasp Thy hand in mine,
Nor ever murmur, nor repine,
Content whatever lot I see,
Since 'tis Thy hand that leadeth me!

Refrain

Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

Charge to God's People:

Every hand that we don't shake must become a phone call that we place. Every embrace that we avoid must become a verbal expression of warmth and concern. Every inch and every foot that we physically place between ourselves and another, must become a thought as to how we might be of help to that other, should that need arise. –Rabbi Yosef Kanevsky of Los Angeles

Benediction Response:

What Wondrous Love Is This

3. To God and to the Lamb I will sing, I will sing
To God and to the Lamb I will sing,
To God and to the Lamb
Who is the Great "I Am,"
While millions join the theme, I will sing, I will sing
While millions join the theme, I will sing.

God's peace for the week:

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

May God bring you peace in anxious times.

Postlude – "Lead Us, Heavenly Father, Lead Us"

Faith in a Pandemic, “Now Thank We All Our God”

By BENJAMIN PRATT

Author of [*A Guide for Caregivers*](#)

Those words of this well-known hymn are particularly meaningful in our world right now, when the coronavirus has become a pandemic. Ironically, they were penned in 1636-1637, during an outbreak of yet another terrible plague.

Knowing more about the history of this hymn can point us to spiritual resources for coping with the uncertainties of the coronavirus. The text of the iconic hymn of thanksgiving and praise was written during a relentless war and severe plague by Martin Rinkart, a German Lutheran clergyman and author of hymns.

Rinkart became head of the archdiocese of Eilenburg, where he was born in 1586 and died in 1649. He served there during the Thirty Years’ War and a severe plague. Eilenburg was a walled town and refuge for fugitives from far and near. It suffered from famine and disease in the midst of unsanitary and over-crowded conditions. As if the war was not enough, the extraordinary severity of the plague took the lives of all but three of the town council, numerous children and the clergymen of a neighboring parish.

During the great pestilence, officials and clergy either died or ran away, leaving Rinkart alone to care for the living and the dead. He read the burial service for 40-50 persons a day—in all about 4,480. Eventually the burials were moved to trenches, without service.

The total of 8,000 persons who died included Rinkart’s wife. This was followed by one sacking by the Austrians and two by the Swedes who levied crippling fines on the town. It was Rinkart’s prayers and negotiations that reduced the levys. His body and finances were worn out—and he died at the age of 63.

*O may this bounteous God through all our life be near us,
with ever joyful hearts and blessed peace to cheer us;
and keep us in God’s grace, and guide us when perplexed
and free us from all ills in this world and the next.*

The original text was entitled, “*Tisch-Gebetlein*,” or a “short Grace before meals.” This is amazing, considering the famine that accompanied the War and the insufferable plague. It is our human yearning and remembrance of God’s bounty, love, guidance, and appeal for peace, for freedom from suffering, for assurance of salvation, that people most needed.

In a time in which it appears that God has gone silent and abandoned us, this hymn heralds the deepest sense of faith—an everlasting presence of God in whom we trust.

The final verse is Rinkart’s paraphrase of the *Gloria Patri*.

*All praise and thanks to God, who reigns in highest heaven,
with ever joyful hearts and blessed peace to cheer us;
the one eternal God, whom heaven and earth adore,
the God who was, and is, and shall be evermore.*

May we, in this time of a pandemic, yearn for the faith, trust, gratitude, courage and love which undergirded the life and work of Martin Rinkart.

May we remember those afflicted with the virus who cannot be held and embraced by their loved ones as they die.

May we remember those who must risk their own health to care for the afflicted—those who must choose between preserving their own health and going to work to put food on the family table.

May we remember those who will lose work and have no monetary cushion.

When we cannot embrace our loved ones, let us seek new ways to be the loving embrace of God to our neighbors.

Amen

- Written March 13, 2020, by my hand, while living in the petri dish of a Continuing Care Community for Seniors.