

Sermon for Sunday 22 April 2018
Fourth Sunday in Easter

Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, Jerusalem
Deacon Adrainne Gray

Psalm 23

“Guide me Along the Way, and Make me Willing to Follow it”

Alleluia, Christ is Risen!

Early last week, Pastor Carrie, making preparations for her departure this week, had to make sure several things were in order. She prepared the bulletin, she made sure there were congregation members to assist during service, she lined up Sarah as a pianist, she asked Doug and John to take on Tuesday morning text study, she assured Monday night bookclub members that Shadia would be ready to facilitate in her absence, and she sent me the text for this Sunday.

There was a lot to do to turn over her congregation and ministries to others, not to mention what she might have had to do at home to prepare her family, (peek at Robert) and I'd say she did it systematically and as methodical as she could making lists, and sending emails.

In her email to me with the text for this Sunday, she wrote in BOLD across the top of the email,

“Interesting...didn't you have Psalm 23 the last time you preached for me??”

Interesting indeed, Alleluia, Christ is risen, Christ is Risen indeed, Alleluia!

Yes, the last time I preached was May of last year, also the fourth Sunday in Easter, and Psalm 23 was a part of the lectionary text, and she just so happened to need a fill in on the Fourth Sunday in Easter, again.

Yes, in the busyness of preparing to go, there was much that still had to be left to the Spirit moving among us all. At some point, Pastor Carrie had to say good enough and leave, trusting that the Spirit of God would guide us and the ministries that we have come to rely on for our own personal growth and fellowship.

I wrote in my email response, “Yep, I think God’s trying to tell me something!”

But still, I spent all week tossing around ideas and asking God for the direction I may go with the Gospel text in John. Not much was coming, until I sat down to write, the Spirit was persistent and said, "deal with Psalm 23," this is personal.

The Psalms are poetic proclamations of the human's relationship with God. That's the way I like to summarize them, using literary tools to help the hearer understand the experience, their encounter with the Almighty. Using metaphors, and the images of nature to make us look to what's here on earth to understand what can't be seen. Or the Psalms force us to find words to express trust in God's mercy even in the midst of pain and affliction. One of my favorites, Psalm 90 illustrates this:

"Lord, make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, and for as many years as we have seen evil."

So far, we have witnessed the crucifixion, women who found the tomb without Jesus' body, albeit not empty of the Messianic promises, and we've seen the risen Christ in the flesh, wounds and hungry! Our identity as Christians revealed in His physical presence.

It began in Jerusalem, the City of the Resurrection, but Christ doesn't intend for the living, breathing, eating, mystery of the Resurrection to stay here!

There is a process. Not necessarily an email, or a To-Do list like we work from when preparing to leave town, but he has given us guides to comfort us.

We can look to the sky, to the earth, to our Scripture, and to our neighbor for where we go from here. How does the Resurrection move beyond Jerusalem?

"He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters."

We can look to the natural world,

In 1977, a small planet that sort of resembles Saturn, was discovered by astronomers. This planet Chiron is moving through the solar system, moving from one zodiac constellation into another. Astrologers - call Chiron the wounded-healer because they believe its presence during this astronomical season is an opportunity for discovering healing from within and sharing this discovery with other people. Amazing, there are celestial signs of healing and sharing.

In seminary, I took several courses in practical theology. Practical theology is pretty much what it sounds like, it is theology practiced on the ground. It borrows from philosophy like the other theology classes, but then it asks, "How do we live this out?"

According to Dr. Richard Osmer, a well-known practical theologian, there are four tasks necessary for practical theology to happen.

I think of Osmer's fourth task as fitting for this Fourth Sunday in Easter - the Pragmatic Task.

Osmer writes, "This is the task of forming and enacting strategies of action that influence events in ways that are desirable."

In other words, a transforming leader or servant leader moves individuals, groups, and systems to "deep change" and our churches today are in need of the "deep change" necessary to change the current environment around them, to send them into radical activism.

However, Osmer warns that this is the most difficult of leadership styles because people don't want to change or lay down power, to move to another stage.

Christ, our wounded one, redefines the nature of power and authority by taking the form of servant and we too must serve to bring about change, and just like Jesus this will stir up resistance.

The Christ,
The wounded-healer,
The servant-leader,
The Good Shepherd, throughout the entire cycle of planetary movement, sends us into the world, into the universe with trust (sometimes an uncertain-faltering-weak-barely-believing-kind-of-trust, but nevertheless a trace of trust) that God will remain with us wherever we walk.

"Even 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."

And we, Redeemer, walk in some fairly shadowy places. Either, internal shadows within our psyche that we keep hidden for fear of being devoured by them, or the shadows of this place, the City of Resurrection. Many of us walk with people who are disappearing in the shadows of death everyday, and suffer deep gashes of injustice and racism in Gaza, in Bethlehem, in Hebron, in Jerusalem, and in our mother countries.

Trust that God is with us in our darkest hour *and* in our most joyous moments.
Trust that God stands with you even when you can hardly stand to be with yourself.
Trust that God has every mark and wound that you bear, and also thinks it hurts.

“Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”

Our Psalmist, like Jesus in the Gospel text is preparing our way as the Gospel reaches all nations and all people. We must come to trust that the Good Shepherd is with us, for this resurrection task will be difficult. We will collect our own wounds, possibly wounding others along the way, and feel isolated and weary, but we can continually ask God to make us willing to follow,

The Way of Salvation,
The Way of Forgiveness,
The Way of Truth,
The Way of Mercy,
The Way of Love,
The Way of Restoration.

“He restores my soul.”

All people of God are called to diakonia (service) but the beginning of that service starts within and works its way outward... This is part of the process.

Psalm 23 can be used as a very personal mantra:

I shall not want
Leads me beside still waters
Leads me in right paths for his name’s sake
They comfort me
My cup overflows
I shall dwell in the house of the Lord....

But the imperative, or the command that the Gospel helps us to see in Psalm 23, is that God will help us,

Believe that,
I shall not want
Leads me beside still waters
Leads me in right paths for his name’s sake
They comfort me
My cup overflows
I shall dwell in the house of the Lord....

for myself, so that I can believe it for others;

They shall not want
Leads *all* beside still waters
Leads *us* in right paths for his name’s sake
They comfort *humanity*

*Our cup overflows
We shall dwell in the house of the Lord....*

Together.

Believe it for myself, and through the power of the life laid down for me, and all others, I can go forward, move, and come back again with all God's children to dwell in the house of the Lord.

This is our preparation into the adventurous book of Acts where the disciples begin to perform miracles, carrying out the Gospel message by revealing their afflictions to one another and where we join in the *launch* of the resurrection, into all the galaxies. (PAUSE)

In the United States it is Poetry Month, so in honor of the Psalms, our inspired biblical poetry, I'd like to leave you with this poem:

A Prayer of Saint Bridget of Sweden

Oh Lord, come soon and enlighten the night.

As the dying are longing, so I am longing for you.

Impress upon my soul that nothing happens without your permission,

And nothing you permit is without consolation.

Oh Jesus, Son of God, You stood silent in front of those who condemned you.

Guard my tongue until I realize what to say and how to say it.

Guide me along the way and make me follow it willingly:

 To hesitate is wrong,

 To go on, is dangerous.

Fulfill my longing and show me the way.

I am coming to you as the injured to their physician.

Oh, Lord, silence my heart.

“Continue, Redeemer, walking the journey of Resurrection, and TRUST that God is with you. Amen”