



WHERE THE DOORS OF THE CHUCH SWING OPEN ON THE HINGES OF LOVE AND PEACE

# The Pastor's Portion

March 29, 2020

Spiritual Nourishment for the Soul



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## PALM SUNDAY AND EASTER

I am so grateful that as I make my phone calls to congregants, that everyone seems to be faring well in these challenging times. Please continue to take care of yourselves, wash your hands, stay in and around your home and be careful when you shop if you go out at all.

We are making plans for a scaled back virtual worship service for Palm Sunday and Resurrection Sunday. Palm Sunday is Communion Sunday. Everyone should be ready in their homes with a juice, wine or beverage of your choice and a piece of bread. We will consecrate the elements together and share them at the same time. For palms, if you are able get some branches leaves or flowers from outside and we will use this representing the palms.

**We look forward to a huge celebration when we can gather in person!**



### Weekly Inspiration:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:  
 where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
 where there is injury, pardon;  
 where there is doubt, faith;  
 where there is despair, hope;  
 where there is darkness, light;  
 where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.  
 Amen. **Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi**

**PLEASE JOIN US FOR VIRTUAL WORSHIP ON SUNDAY AT 11AM THROUGH ZOOM TECHNOLOGY ON YOUR COMPUTER OR THE PHONE.**

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/268033036?pwd=b1ZoeDFYSzdFV3A5M0hSNFpTamtVZz09>

Meeting ID: 268 033 036

Password: 170245

One tap mobile

+16465588656 code:268033036#  
 US (New York)

**JOIN US FOR MID WEEK BIBLE STUDY ON WEDNESDAY AT 7PM**

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/506186798>

Meeting ID: 506 186 798

One tap mobile

+16465588656,,506186798# US  
 (New York)

**I AM CALLED**  
to help the poor,  
the hungry, the thirsty,  
the hurting, the abused,  
the broken.

O, Holy Father, Creator God we are here today to praise your name and to offer our thanks for all you do in our lives. We are ever so grateful that you are in our lives. And yet I know you agonize over how we can't get it right, or maybe don't want to get it right. We hear your agony Lord. We hear your pain when we fail to do the things you have so carefully instructed us on how to do; what to do, where to do, and when to do. Like your disciples Lord we flounder on simple agendas to enhance the lives of others; we backtrack on issues of social justice, we provide no voice in political and civil engagement. We cannot help but be a disappointment.

And yet, God you are not oblivious in acknowledging that the weight of the world comes crashing in on us every single day – that we are subjected to humiliation, intimidation, hate, prejudice, economic deprivation, ridicule, bias, intolerance, injustices, and finally making sometimes life changing decisions. But Christ, Lord Jesus says these encumbrances do not rule the day. No! They don't. Because the spirit, the Holy Spirit embraces us,

shields us, frees us from those chains. We confess that too often we come to you only with our problems. And yet, you are always there! We pause this morning to say thank you. Thank you for accepting us when we are least acceptable. We thank you for restoring our hope when our dreams have been crushed; for your presence when we feel abandoned, we thank you for your forgiveness when we fail. We thank you for the gift of life when we feel defeated, for the struggles in life when we become too complacent.

O Holy and awesome God we are also here today to pray – to pray for our release from the captivity of desire for wealth and power, from our need for acceptance; from our need for feeling superior, and from our need for self-control.

We pray for those whose voices have been silenced, who lack food and water; medicine, protection from the elements. And whose nights are shrouded in terror. Be with all of those whose lives are in peril or distress – here and abroad, soldier or civilian. We pray for them even as we pray for ourselves that we might be moved to pursue lives that reflect the spirit and zeal of your Son.

Awesome God, we are grateful for the sense of your sustaining power that continuously blesses us in spite of all we say and do.

Renew our strength Lord and give us the hope that only you can provide. We ask for this and so much more in the name of your son, and our savior Jesus Christ.

*Rev. Earvin Graves' prayer at the third Sacred Conversation on Race. The Church in the Highlands May 7, 2017*



## March 29,2020 Sermon

### 23rd Psalm Part 2

Last week we discussed the first three verses of this most popular psalm, today we will look at the last three verses. It is appropriate as we live in these times when we hear so much about death and dying, where we are surrounded by stories in the news about the people who are perishing from this virus for us to come face to face with the prospect of death.

David understood when you go thru crisis you have to begin to look towards God, because God has made a promise though his son that God would be right there with you. Listen to the words of David: He said yea though I walk...not run, not race, not speed but WALK through the valley of the shadow of death...David knew what it was to walk in the darkness, valley of shadow of death...the darkest valley. And (by the way), even if you are walking on the right path, you will experience the dark valley you will go through something, whether you believe in God or not, you will come under attack, you will go through storms, you will suffer at times because all of the trials and tribulations are intended to elevate you to another place.

David says: Yea though I WALK.....through...not run, not flee... not rush.... but walk. SEE EVEN WHEN YOU ARE IN A STORM you need to take your time having confidence that God will always be there with you protecting you and shielding you from dangers seen and unseen. And once you have strolled through the valley of the shadow of death.....you will be a different person, you will be transformed, you will be stronger better and wiser!

We spend so much time trying to avoid our storms, but in reality, we should welcome them, because like the refiner's fire, they purify and strengthen us! What would really be tragic in this global pandemic is if the world did not wake up to all of the ways in which we miss the mark, all the ways in which we do not glorify God, all of the ways in which we misuse and abuse the creation, ourselves and other human beings. If we do not see this situation as an opportunity to grow closer to God, if we just look at it as an inconvenience and a disruption to our little petty and puny plans, then we will have missed the God moment...I beg of you--don't miss it!

Notice that David didn't say the valley OF DEATH he said the valley of the shadow of death! Shadows are caused when there is something that obstructs the light (they are illusions) no shadows at nighttime unless there is light present...shadows are evidence that there is light present.

Jesus said he was the light of the world...so you know that when you are going through, and you think you are in the valley of the shadow, remember that there is light is somewhere around. We keep running from illusions! And illusions are dangerous things, they can't hurt you, they can make you hurt yourself running into illusions

Stop running from shadows  
...there's no one but you and God!  
You have to take God at his word. Even death is an illusion itself, because we know in the word of God that God has power over death hell and the grave. Death does not have the final say in your life. Death have no dominion or power. It is a shadow that is over your life that is not real.

For thou art with me: The advantage that sheep have is that they can see their shepherd. Now, even though they have bad eyesight, and can only see six feet in front of them, they can at least see the shepherd who is taking care of them. That's really one of our problems, and why we become so anxiety ridden, we can't see God...we can see the God in things around us, but if we were ever to come face to face with God, it would be too much for us.

In this passage, David is telling us: God is with you...and this is not from a man who had it all together who did not experience serious abandonment issues in his life. You can't be a human being on this planet with normal emotions and feelings and reactions and not have gone through a period in your life, a crisis in your life, a situation in your life when, despite your faith in God, you felt alone. John of the Cross called this the Dark Night of the Soul...when you are feeling so alone, so much in despair so defeated and dejected, where every minute seems like midnight, and he proposes that this is precisely when God is at God's most powerful and present with you...this is when God comes directly or God sends the angel you need to show you the light. God's strength is made perfect in our weakness. That feeling of being alone is also an illusion to trick you or lure you into closer relationship with God.

And in that closer relationship you will experience the Shepherd's Rod and staff: When shepherds were in the fields, they had to use certain tools or instruments to keep the sheep headed in the right direction. Rods were two feet long with a knot on the end. The shepherd would use it to beat attackers who tried to take sheep. It is a tool of

protection. The staff is used as a tool for correction: and direction. Sheep would try to go their own way and the staff would use to get them back in place sheep thought they know more than shepherd. Sometimes God has to break you by using God's staff to get you back in line. The staff is interesting because there was a hook on the end of the staff and the shepherd would use the hook to pull the sheep back in line with the direction of the flock. When God pulls you back in line, God does it for a PURPOSE!

God is a master strategist and really is moving you around his chess board for one reason, so that God will always get the glory.

Then David says God Prepares a table before you in the presence of your enemies. We love this part because Everyone wants to be blessed! But here's the rub: blessings are the natural outpouring of intimacy with God. In fact, you don't have to ask for blessings, God knows what you need and has a way of searching your heart. Your prayers do not have to be a beg-athon ASKING God for this and that as though God is some sort of cosmic bellhop. God will give you what you need and more than you could ask for right there In the Presence of your enemies: Notice how David shifts the language from the Good Shepherd to the gracious host.

God will not only Bless you in front of folk who can't stand you, who don't like you or who don't want to see you succeed. David makes it clear that his is not just something that God has done in the past or will do in the future, but something that God is doing NOW in the moment...because it is in the MOMENT that we experience God

in all of God's glory. God wants to show enemies in your life that no matter what they do to you, they can't do ANYTHING to God, and if your blessing was dependent on you they may be able to stop it, but greater is She that is in me than she that is in the world.

David Says: He Anointed my head with oil: Anointed here in this text and context is not the same as in other places in the First Testament. When David was appointed and anointed the leader of Israel by Samuel, the word used by the writer was morshak in Hebrew (meaning to rub with oil). Here anointed my head with oil the word used is dorshay which means to fatten or build up. Not only does He prepare the table, but he builds you up in front of your enemies ...

God will build you up and then anoints with oil to protect you. So, the image of anointing has a secondary meaning: because David was a shepherd, he knew lions and bears were not the real problems. What really aggravates sheep are the small things: fleas, mosquitos and gnats, fleas and mosquitos and gnats were bad enough, but the REAL problem were nasal flies. These were the smallest and worst enemies. Nasal flies would lay eggs on the mucous membranes on the nose of the sheep and you could not see them. They work their way up the nasal passages into the sheep's head; they burrow into the flesh and there set up an intense irritation accompanied by severe inflammation. For relief from this agonizing annoyance, sheep will deliberately beat their heads against trees, rocks, posts, or brush. They will rub them in the soil and thrash around against woody growth. In extreme cases of intense infestation these flies will lead to erratic behavior, blindness and even death.

So, in order to protect the flock-- At the very first sign of flies among the flock, the Shepherd would apply an antidote to their heads. They would use a remedy composed of linseed oil, sulfur and tar which was smeared over the sheep's nose and head as a protection against nose flies.

My cup runneth over: In tending sheep, shepherds have described carrying a bottle with them that contained a mixture of brandy and water. Whenever a ewe or lamb was chilled from undue exposure to wet, cold weather, the Shepherd would pour a few spoonful's down its throat. In a matter of minutes, the chilled creature would be on its feet and full of renewed energy. It is reminiscent of the cup that is poured every first Sunday at the communion table...

David must have come to the bold revelation that his son and the son's henchmen were not the only ones who were chasing him in the wilderness. Because David then sums up his song of praise by making one simple yet profound statement: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life"!

See here, the Hebrew word for Follow is chase. God will chase you all the days of your life. God's Goodness and mercy are chasing you and will always chase you. Imagine goodness and mercy being in hot pursuit of YOU! Goodness is this: when God gives you what you don't deserve. God will bless you in spite of you. Mercy is when God doesn't give you what you do deserve...God will save you in spite of you.

That's why even though we stray, he keeps on blessing, even though we may falter, even though we have

our moods, our controlling ways,  
our tantrums and our little plots  
and schemes against others, I am  
here to tell you that goodness and  
mercy will always be in hot pursuit  
of us! So you can say what you  
want, you can do what you want,  
but I know as I stand here today  
that God is going to keep on  
blessing me, that God's goodness  
and mercy will always be in hot  
pursuit of me.

Beloved, it's so much better to try  
to forgive one another's  
shortcomings, because we all have  
them. It is so much better to try to  
live and serve and worship in  
harmony than it is to worship God  
with bitterness and anger and  
resentment and resistance to the  
new thing God is doing, in fact  
that is not true worship.

Surely goodness and mercy shall  
follow me ALL the days of my life,  
and I WILL DWELL IN THE  
HOUSE OF THE LORD  
FOREVER AND EVER. I will  
stay in the presence of God, every  
time the enemy will try to attack  
me, every time the enemy will come  
after me, every time people try to  
stay away from me or try to hurt  
me, every time people think they  
are doing something that pushes my  
buttons, I declare and decree that I  
will worship God, despite the virus,  
despite the shutdown, despite my  
circumstances, I will bless the Lord  
at all times, and God's praise will  
continually be on my lips!  
Let the redeemed of the Lord say  
so!