



People of God's Peace - Part 5

Inner Peace

Wildwood Mennonite Church // October 18, 2020

Worship Leader: Warren C // Music Leader: Brenda M // Sermon: Joe H

Welcome to Wildwood!

Welcome to Wildwood Mennonite Group to worship together. We are here live this Sunday morning in our church, with a small group as required by our Public Health guidelines. We are also live on Zoom, worshipping in your living room or kitchen or any other place that you choose. We are also on the internet, worshipping at a time and a place of your choosing. Wherever you are, whatever time it is, welcome. Thank you for being together.

Music For Meditation // Brenda M

Call to Worship

We gather, we listen, we read, we sing (to ourselves if we are present in church), we learn.

Today is our new normal, although I dislike that phrase. Normal is today, the present. Life changes, at times slowly, at times quickly and dramatically. Life changes for the people as a whole and the people as individuals. Today we are living with a dominant virus that each of us experiences it in his/her own way. People adapt to life under the threat of this virus, as they always have adapted to dangers and stressful times and situations. For example, Canadians adapted to the shortages of the Second World War, when they had to use their ration coupons to purchase basic items. Canadians survived the ill-named "Spanish" flu of 1918-1919, another pandemic. Canadians survived the Depression of the 1930s and the almost complete crop failure in Saskatchewan in 1937 (when the average yield of wheat was 2.7 bushels an acre). They suffered, some greatly, some less than others. But they changed what they did and how they did it, sometimes for the better, sometimes not. They persevered. They adapted and carried on, as we are doing with this pandemic. Some people will get sick and some will die (as I write this on Friday morning, 9,699 Canadians have died). But the people as a whole will continue, as they have done in the past and will do in the future.

Let us pray:

"God, you made each of us and you instilled in us incredible gifts that enable us to adapt, to persevere, to carry on. We thank you--the generations past, our generation, and the generations to come. Amen"

Song // At Break of Day // Hymnal: A Worship Book #647

Peace Candle

Calm, silence, companionship, solitude, friendship, love, warmth, softness, comfort--these and so many others are words that arise when we think of peace.

Let us pray:

"We ask for peace in our lives and our homes and our communities and our world. And you reply, go and make peace. That is our responsibility, our task. We will try, God, we will try."

Song // *My Shepherd Will Supply My Need* // Hymnal: A Worship Book #589

Offering Prayer

"What do we have to offer--time, money, produce, prayer, assistance? These are forms of help. Yes Lord, we offer to help. Ayuda is Spanish for the English word help. We offer to help – Ofrecemos para ayudar."

Children's Story // [Click here for video storytime with Don!](#)

This week's story is "[The Invisible String](#)" written by Patrice Karst.

Scripture // *Inclusive Bible* translation

Psalm 23

YHWH, you are my shepherd—

I want nothing more.

You let me lie down in green meadows;

you lead me beside restful waters:

you refresh my soul.

You guide me to lush pastures

for the sake of your Name.

Even if I'm surrounded by shadows of Death,

I fear no danger, for you are with me.

Your rod and your staff—

they give me courage.

You spread a table for me

in the presence of my enemies,

and you anoint my head with oil—

my cup overflows!

Only goodness and love will follow me

all the days of my life,

and I will dwell in your house, YHWH,

for days without end.



Sermon // "Shalom on the Inside" // Joe Heikman

(If you'd rather watch than read, the link to the video version will be posted to wildwoodmennonite.org, hopefully by late Sunday afternoon)

Psalm 23

*My God is my shepherd; I shall not want.
You make me to lie down in green pastures;
You lead me beside the still waters
You restore my soul.*

The Peckman family farm didn't have any sheep, and our cows generally stayed in the barns, but we did have some fields that felt to me like these green pastures.

There was one field in particular, at the back of what we called "the South Side", was kind of off on its own surrounded by some woods. There was a narrow dirt lane through the woods, the only way to get to the field. It was maybe just an acre or two that was usually planted in alfalfa. When I was making hay back there, I'd sometimes see deer, whitetails, peering out through the trees.

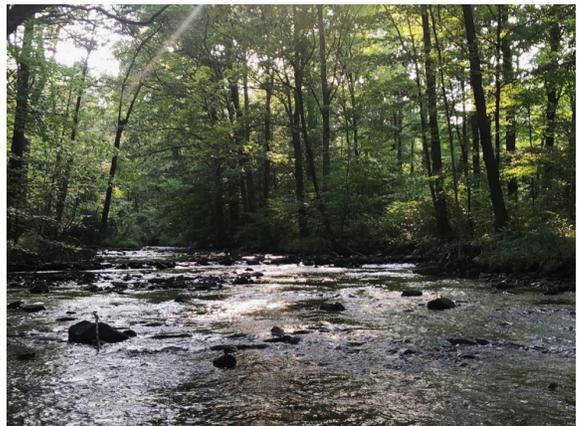


It was totally isolated and sometimes (Don't tell my dad) I'd turn off the tractor for a few minutes to enjoy the quiet and solitude.

That's one of the places my mind goes when I hear about the green pastures of Psalm 23.

Another is the still waters of a creek in the woods at a campground where my mom's extended family would gather for a weekend retreat every summer. I was always one of a whole whack of kids running around in the woods, wading in the creek trying to catch crayfish.

It wasn't a large creek, eight or ten feet across and maybe three feet deep at the spot we called the swimming hole. And usually when I was there it was crawling with kids building dams and pushing each other in the water.



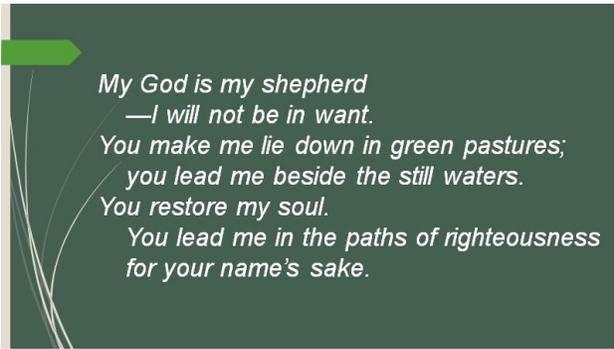
But there were moments when things were quiet, and the sun would pierce down through the trees, and you'd get that overwhelming sense of calm from being surrounded by whispering leaves and ancient rocks and gently flowing water.

Peace.

I imagine most of us have those same kinds of memories attached to the words of this Psalm, perhaps specific green pastures or still waters, or perhaps just the general sense of ahhhhhhh.

Those sacred places definitely feed us and restore our souls.

Today our "People of God's Peace" sermon series is moving inward. What does it mean to have God's Peace in our souls, as individuals, in our hearts and minds and bodies, at the core of who we are?



*My God is my shepherd
—I will not be in want.
You make me lie down in green pastures;
you lead me beside the still waters.
You restore my soul.
You lead me in the paths of righteousness
for your name's sake.*

Those opening lines of Psalm 23 sound like a pretty great description of what inner peace is all about, right? Stillness, quiet, rest, serenity.

I don't know about you, but that's what I've been chasing ever since March. When I picture the end of the pandemic, that elusive "return to normal," whenever that might be, that's what I'm longing for. Those peaceful days when I didn't have to worry about getting too close to people or remembering my masks, when things were so much less complicated, when life was innocent and easy-breezy-beautiful. (You can tell where this is going already...)

These green pastures and still waters, that certainly sounds like what we're trying to get back to. That sounds like home.

Green pastures, still waters, a Gentle Shepherd... surely this is where peace is found: restoration, flourishing, *shalom*. Right? Surely this is the goal of inner peace.

But if this is the destination, why does the Psalmist begin there? And more significantly, why do they leave?

Have you ever noticed that? The green pastures are the beginning of the journey, not the end. The sheep are resting, lying down, lacking nothing...but then the shepherd rouses them, gets them moving. They first go to the still waters, so it's still a pretty chill journey... but there's movement. The restoration comes in motion, in walking the path of what is right.

But pretty quickly, that "right path" turns dark and dangerous: the valley of the shadow of death.



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

I know, the Psalmist is all like: “I will fear no evil... [I laugh in the face of danger](#), muah-ha-ha-ha!”

But still: evil, violence, and enemies - this “path of righteousness” is not a walk in the park.

This shepherd is willing to take risks, to face danger, to endure and perhaps even incite conflict to get wherever they are going.

That’s the first thing I want to point out about *shalom* on the inside, that it’s about motion and growth, not finding a good place and staying there.

Let’s listen to my podcast friend, Dr. Hilary McBride, talk about what she learned from being raised by two therapists as parents, and from her own studies and practice in the field of neuroscience:



So both my parents were therapists and my dad's also a scholar and academic and has written extensively on healing family of origin wounds. I remember a particular linguistic turn of phrase that we would say constantly around the dinner table was “human growth and development,” “human growth and development.”

I remember hearing from a very early age that it was actually good and right to change how we see the world that was actually inherently part of our whole person.

And I could break it down into bio - psycho - social - spiritual - [categories of development] but really like our whole person development. We are wired to change and develop and grow and that that is actually an expression of our flourishing....

And in fact, if we inhibit that in some way, we could look at that and say “where is the pathology?” “why is the system stuck?” “why is it looking the same as it did before?” ...

We actually see that it's our disposition as humans to flourish and be well. That's actually how our system wants to be and our system doesn't necessarily want to stay stuck.

But if we don't have the right conditions then that's how we exist.

And a simple analogy that I think about constantly in my practice [as a therapist] is, if you have a paper cut, you don't have to think about it healing for it to heal. Your body actually wants to repair itself. There is this drive in us that is pushing us always, always, towards goodness, thriving, connection, interdependence, reparation. And then that is actually a fundamental condition of our existence....

... when I'm thinking about what actually is spiritual growth, I think it is anything that takes us outside of what we know and the story that we've been telling about what is. Anything that stretches us just beyond that seems to be kind of a universal condition for spiritual growth and development.

But if we have this idea that God is here then actually what we need for our growth is to believe “God was not here--God was there!” or “God is you--oh, maybe God is me!” “Oh God is not this-- well, that's exactly where God is!” And this is the box that I've been told that God is in. And for me to actually have healthy spirituality, healthy growth, is to somehow stretch and expand and step outside of that whatever it is.

And so while God is certainly present in the green meadow, beside the still water, there is something inherent in life that finds the Shepherd leading us “[further up and further in.](#)” *Shalom* requires movement, change, growth. Even the scary kind. It's the unknown, the unexplored territory where we find God.

Motion:
the way of peace is growth

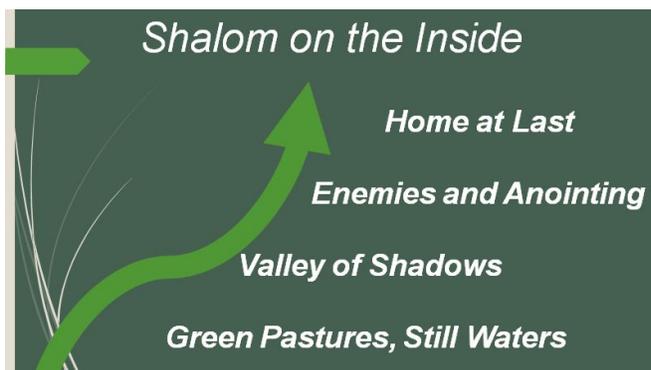
My second observation about the *shalom* of Psalm 23, more of a wondering, really, is about the duration and the direction of the Psalm.

I suppose that I've often thought of this poem as operating on the grand scale of life, how the Good Shepherd leads us through various seasons that tend to come up in every life.

This is a popular scripture text for funeral services, and I know that I've preached it in those settings as a way to look back over the life of the deceased, to point out, “that time when she lost her child,” or “when he was injured and forced into an early retirement,” that was the time in



their life when they were really going through the valley of the shadow of death. Or, on the flip side, “they had just moved into the city and were delighted to spend time with their grandchildren and reconnecting with old friends,” that was a season of green meadows and still waters.” Etc.



I think life feels like that sometimes, filled with ups and downs, but happening in large seasons, generally all moving in some steady direction.

Some of you are familiar with the Christian classic “Pilgrim’s Progress.” The hero is on the road to the Celestial City, and he goes through a series of trials and troubles, one challenge after another, with periods of rest and healing

in between. It’s a long journey, but each step—even the most challenging stages—is a step forwards, towards the ultimate destination.

That’s usually how I think of this Psalm: a long winding path through the pastures, down into the darkness of the valley, through the confrontation with the enemies, and then winding up with the heavenly feast in the eternal house of YHWH.

But look at the poem again, through the eyes of an actual shepherd. Again, I have very limited experience with pasture-based agriculture, but I do believe that eating and drinking is a daily activity for sheep, not a seasonal one.

I imagine that a shepherd might get up each morning, lead the sheep out to pasture to let them graze for a while. And then over to the creek for some water, back out to the pasture. And then the sun starts to go down and so the shepherd leads the sheep on the path back towards home. And now the valley is dark, and you know Elijah lost a couple of his sheep to a pack of wolves in this exact spot just last week, so this is definitely a scary spot with the shadows rising, you grip that rod and that staff pretty tightly, I’m sure.

And when you get the sheep safely back into their pen, it’s finally time to eat a bit yourself. But you share your meal with the other workers, and we all know how poorly everyone treats shepherds—it’s almost like trying to eat in front of your enemies. And then it’s back to work, taking care of some of the sick sheep—I’m told [that’s what the “anointing with oil” line is about](#), the shepherd protecting the sheep from infestations of flies, or perhaps treating any cuts and bruises from the trail.

And then finally, it’s time to go home, to rest for a while.

And then, the next day, it’s back to the pasture, back to the waters, again with the valley and the enemies and the eating and the tending, and then to rest before going out another day.

And so it goes.

It may be that this is a poem for the grand scale of life. Sometimes, we find peace in extended seasons of green pastures, where life makes sense and we feel healthy and whole. Sometimes, we do hit those valleys where *everything* is darkness and trouble, where we're overwhelmed and the only path to peace is to hunker down and endure until we reach the other side.

But more often, I think, the path looks something more like this. Our days are a mixture of both, of green pastures and dark shadows right up against each other, of still waters in one moment and conflict with enemies the next.

And so maybe this is a shepherd's poem for the daily grind, the daily highs and lows, and the daily reminder that "surely, this day is part of the goodness and mercy that follow me every day of my life."



Pastor Eileen and I were talking about that reality this week, and she mentioned a day where she attended a friend's funeral in the morning and a granddaughter's dance recital in the afternoon.

That sounds about right--weeping in the morning, dancing in the afternoon. "Life is like a box of chocolates," you might say.

That sounds like shepherd wisdom - You never get to spend the whole day in the meadow, the work is never entirely finished, you never go through the valley of shadows once-and-for all. Life doesn't happen with clean lines and straightforward progress. The good and the bad come all mixed up, and sometimes they just stay that way, day after day.

And still, somehow, day after day, there is a table, there is nourishment and healing. *All of this* is still goodness and mercy, day after day.

Direction:

*the path is [meant to be?] convoluted
and repetitive*

So then, just as peace is not about remaining in the innocence we found in the green meadows at the start of the poem, peace is also much more than finally arriving at the glorious destination, the "house of YHWH."

You poetry enthusiasts will have already noticed that the last stanza of the poem switches to the future tense, goodness and love *will follow* me, and I *will* dwell in the house of my God.

*Surely goodness and mercy will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of my God
for the length of my days.*

I can imagine the exhausted shepherd repeating that like a mantra at the end of each day. “Even today’s troubles *will* turn into goodness and love, things *will* be better tomorrow, I *will* dwell in the House of my God the length of my days.”

Some days are like that, when peace feels like a future hope we can barely hold onto.

But in the details of the poem, the peace of God’s presence is literally in the present tense the whole time.

I know that’s supposed to be obvious, it’s right there in the opening line: “My God is my shepherd, I lack nothing.” Full stop.

That’s *shalom*, nothing missing, nothing broken. Already at the start, whether the sheep are aware of it or not. The poem isn’t describing the process of how to get to *shalom*, it’s an affirmation of the peace of God that is present all the time.

It’s there in the restoration of the green pastures and still waters, of course.

It’s also there in the valley of shadows, in the solace of the rod and staff countering the weight of fear.

It’s there in the confrontation with enemies: the table of nourishment.

It’s there in the word of healing and tending the wounds: my thirst is quenched, my cup is filled.

That’s how the shepherd poet is so confident that goodness and love *will* follow, because that is what he has seen at every convoluted step of the journey.

As people of faith, we know this, we have seen it ourselves. Not constantly, but often enough that we’re still here, still longing for the divine embrace, still hoping for *shalom*. The desire for God, whatever that feels like to you, is witness to the experience of God’s presence.

Shalom on the Inside

Motion:

the way of peace is growth

Direction:

the path is [meant to be?] convoluted and repetitive

Destination:

everything belongs, already.

I think that’s why this poem has endured as so meaningful to so many people.



There's something about the looking for *shalom* that brings it into being. Not by jumping ahead to the end of the story, but by learning to see, or at least *trying* to see, the goodness and love of God in everything.

Wherever you are in the journey today, whatever valleys and shadows and enemies you may encounter, whatever the moments of restoration may look like, my prayer for each of us is that we will pay attention to the longing for *shalom* inside of us. That we will allow the longing to point us to the belonging, of everything.

Peace be with you, inside and out. Amen.

Song of Response // Healer of Our Every Ill // Hymnal: A Worship Book #377

Sharing Time

Not hearing from one another in person through the Sharing Time is a significant loss for many of us. Sharing items can be emailed to the church office or the pastors to be shared with the congregation. If you're able, join us for our Sunday Morning Zoom gatherings, or check your email for the sharing items from last Sunday. Or maybe now would be a good time to pause your reading to call someone from church or elsewhere that you haven't heard from this week.

Congregational Prayer // Eileen Klaassen

Spirit of God,
As we watch leaves falling from trees, not in a direct line, but blown about,
Fluttering, zigzagging their way to the earth,
and even then, rolling across the grass and down the street;
As we consider the last kayaking adventure of the season,
Putting up the sail, and letting the wind rather than our own efforts move us across the water,
So let us be open to your leading, to following where your spirit blows.

And while it is good, and even of value, to simply rest in one spot for a while,
To refresh and restore our souls in the beauty of your creation,
Let us remember also that true life means moving on to whatever adventures are in store,
And that no matter where we are led, no matter what our particular valley,
Whether through doubts, or depression, or loss of ability, or even the shadow of death,
Despite our griefs, our struggles, our challenges,
You are still guiding us, gently directing our path, and leading us to a new place
Until we reach the shore of a destination beyond our imagining,
Whether on this earth or beyond.



In this time of the Covid pandemic, O God,
There is uncertainty because life is not as predictable as we had thought,
A knowing that we will never return to life as it once was.
There is a certain fear that the health we took for granted is in jeopardy
And that we, or God forbid! those most dear to us, might contract this virus,
become permanently affected, or even die.
We cannot deny the terror of these thoughts, O God,
And yet we pray to remember that whether we live or die,
Nothing can separate us from your love,
for we are always held safe in the palm of your hand.,
Help us to not gaze too far ahead in this journey,
but rather, let us trust in your guidance.
Give us courage to live in - and value - each moment of our lives.

At this time we remember particularly Doris, in the hospital,
we remember Don and Ben, Russell and April and their family,
in a journey that has at once seemed long, but also very short.
Give them strength and peace to endure the tumult of these days.

We pray for those who are weighed down by the burdens of sickness and death around them,
For those feeling lonely and discouraged,
For those carrying the weight of broken relationships,
And responsibilities beyond what seems manageable.

Spirit of God, help us to be mindful of the good things,
Grateful for life events such as the wedding of Tiera and Jonathon
on what may have been one of the last warm days of the season.
Bless their love and their life together.

We are grateful for all healing of body, mind and spirit.
We are grateful for the healing of relationships in what seemed like impossible circumstances,
Knowing your hand has been at work.

Spirit of all comfort, fill our hearts,
Spirit of all kindness, be our guide,
Spirit of compassion, fill each heart.

Holy Spirit of God, may we know peace beyond our fear,
Trusting that your love, your mercy, and your ultimate goodness
Will guide, surround, and follow us all the days of our lives.
Amen.

Song // *The Peace of the Earth* // Sing the Journey #77

Benediction

"Let God's warmth fill you. Let His/Her warmth guide you. Go with your worship of God comforting you and leading you. Amen"

