



Still Water People – TouchPoint for May 8, 2019

Psalm 23 [NRSV]

*The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want; he makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.
He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I 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.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life;
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*

Grace and Peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

“The Lord is my Shepherd.”

It's always risky, I suppose, to speak about something so familiar. The 23rd Psalm. It has to rank right up there with the Lord's Prayer and John 3:16 as far as well-known Bible passages go. People ask me to read it at almost every funeral I do. I was asked to read it recently at one I just did. An unfortunate situation, someone in their mid-20's gone way too soon. Only this time, I didn't read it, I memorized it. And I encouraged the people to close their eyes, and calm their minds, and quiet their hearts, and together we would experience the Psalm as I spoke it. I don't know if it was powerful for them, but it made an impact on me.

Because it got me thinking about this poem/prayer in a different sort of way. I mean, shepherds have never been a big part of my life. As a matter of fact, I've never met one. Though I did take a bunch of pictures of them when I was in Israel and Jordan. One was driving his sheep around in the back of his pick-up truck. Ahhh, shepherding in the 21st century. “The Lord is my shepherd. He drives me in his truck to faucet-filled water troughs, in the shade of pre-fabricated buildings.” OK, it doesn't quite have the same feeling to it. But it got me to thinking: how does one hear this Psalm in our present day? Is it simply an old relic of a bygone era that demands an understanding of, or a return to, a time and a culture so vastly different from ours?

So often, when I've heard this passage talked about, I feel like I'm being given a detailed history lesson in 1st century sheep herding, which, if I can be totally frank, bores me to death. So how does one hear this anew? Let me try to come at it from a different perspective, a different place, and hopefully this will work for you.

This psalm is a description of my life. Not so much a description of the places I have gone in my life, but rather a description of the people in my life. There are people who have been green pastures in my life; who have allowed me to lie down, let go, find rest and respite in their presence. Not demanding anything of me other than to simply be.

There are people who have been still waters; who have been depths of wisdom and a place of calm in the turbulence of life. People who have restored my soul. People who have been with me in the valley of the shadow of death which is basically all of life. All of life is lived in the shadow of death. Ask the family who I just did the 24-year old funeral for. Ask my friends whose sister-in-law died suddenly. Life is lived within the valley of the shadow of death. And the Divine Mystery, and the people it sends, don't just appear in times of trouble but are walking with us every step of the way.

There are people who have had my back, invited me over for dinner, prepared a table for me when I colored outside of institutional lines, ruffled some feathers, and disturbed those church leaders who looked at the church, more as a safe haven for their career, than a place of mission. These people, and others like them, have overflowed my cup of life with goodness and mercy, and grace and forgiveness.

Is this what the Psalmist means when he says, *“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life...?”*

One commentary I read said that the word we translate as ‘follow’ is really more like the word ‘pursue’ as in ‘relentlessly pursue.’ This sense of a God, the Divine Mystery as one who is constantly on our tail. Never letting go, never easing up, sending people into our lives. This God, this Divine Mystery, hasn’t just pursued me in the past, it continues to this present day. It isn’t just in the past it has happened, it’s happening now.

I had coffee the other day with a gentleman who has a deep sense of wisdom and calmness about him. Conversation with him is like drinking from a deep well of grace. I have another friend who overflows my cup of grace with her interpretation of scripture. Capturing and seeing things I would never think of in a million years. There is a group I sit down with every week to reflect on this Wednesday time together—it is like a green pasture where restoration of soul is a constant event. I am forever being led, or maybe it’s relentlessly pursued, by the Divine Mystery. I don’t know, maybe it’s both.

So what about you? Who are the green pastures of your life? Who are the still waters? Who has restored your soul? Who has led you in paths of goodness? Been with you in the shadows of life? Who’s had your back and sat at table with you when the world turned on you? Who’s filled your cup to overflowing? Who has done those things and is doing them for you?

Because, you see, to identify those people, those times, and those places is to realize that you have already been dwelling in the House of the Lord your whole life—forever. Because, you see, the House of the Lord is not a future place but a place you’ve been living in all along, are still living in and always will be living in. And even if you feel like you have run away from this Home it will relentlessly pursue you—FOREVER!!! Amen.

OK, so let’s go through this again. Get comfortable, close your eyes, only this time I want you to see people in your life either in those places mentioned or as those places.

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