

March 31, 2019 Psalm 23 Rev. Micol Cottrell

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Because she knew that she had enough she shared generously. She didn't always have a whole lot but she was generous in her life. She gave with the work of her hands. She shared her skill and wisdom. She gave with the fire of passion that burned strong within her. She gave with her time and her compassion. Because she knew she had enough she lived a life of abundant generosity. Because she knew she was enough she lived as a blessing to others.

On Thursday as I was writing this sermon I spent a while trying to think of a person or some people who fit this description – someone who shared their life generously and blessed others. I was struggling. But the struggle wasn't because I couldn't think of a person. The trouble was that as I started to think I couldn't narrow it down to a couple of people. Most of us can think of someone in our life or in our world who was able to look at their life and say "I have enough" and out of this live a life of abundance and generosity. These are the people who have blessed us, family, friends, strangers, or public figures. They may or may not have had much in terms of what they owned. They may or may not have been able to do all that they would have wanted. But nevertheless they blessed us with abundance. Instead of me telling you about some of the people I know who fit this description let's pause for a moment and remember those in our life who lived generously and in turn blessed us. (pause)

Because they knew they had enough and because they knew they were enough our lives have been blessed by them.

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Psalm 23 is one of the most well known of the Psalms. It has been read countless times in churches, at funerals, been stitched into fabric, painted onto paper, and etched into our minds. Perhaps when it was read this morning you started to even mouth the words. You might know the whole psalm or most of it by heart. “The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want...”

Psalm 23 is an ancient worship song of praise. It sings of confidence in God and moves into thanksgiving. Just as God lead the Israelites out of Egypt and through the wilderness so too God will lead us through the dark valleys, through our times of distress and suffering. Just as God provided for the needs of those who wandered the desert by setting the table of manna and quail so God will set a table before us even in the presence of our enemies and will anoint our head with oil as one anoints the head of an honoured guest. Just as enemies once pursued us now it will be God’s goodness and mercy that will seek us out. This song of trust in God is so powerful that the early church would often sing this song as a newly baptised person emerged from the water, entered the sanctuary to receive Communion, and confidently took their place in the body of Christ. “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want...”

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Throughout this reflective season of Lent we have been exploring Stewardship. All that we are and all that we have is a gift from God. We have been asking ourselves how we respond in faith to this good news? Looking at the opening line of Psalm 23 in light of stewardship the Rev. David Jagger reflects: “For our day and age, it might be the most revolutionary idea in the entire Bible since everything we see and hear and experience demands, over and over, that we consume, buy, accumulate,

hoard, succeed, and want. Faster, stronger, smarter. More, more, more! Yet this Bible song starts with the subversive idea that “I shall not want.” Rev. Jagger invites us to look at this psalm not just as words of comfort but a prophetic song that calls us to see the world in a new way- through God’s abundance.

I shall not want. It is important to note that this passage is not and should not be used to say to our self or to others who are in deep and very real need “don’t worry about it.” It should not be used to glorify poverty and suffering or to dismiss deep need. The statement “I shall not want” must be held in the whole Biblical framework of God’s love and justice. For those who are hungry for food, security, or inclusion and affirmation, for those who are in need of safety, support, or care, for those who are crying out for justice the response can never be “you should not want” it should be “we will trust that God is leading us in the right paths of justice and healing.”

Our faith is centred in the idea that we are in relationship – in covenant – with God and with one another. We are connected as with sacred threads, life to life to life. When one suffers our hearts break with them. When one celebrates we feel our body joining in the dance.

“I shall not want” is about living in this sacred connection. It is about looking at our life and breaking out of the lie that we never have enough, breaking out of the temptation of scarcity. Because if we never feel as if we never have enough and if we never see that we are enough than how can we share life with one another? How can we be there to support one another and to feel their support? How can we join in the building up of this

church, this community, this world? How can we bless others and be blessed by them? The lie of scarcity divides us, causes us to build up our walls, to hoard our life, and to miss out on so much of God's blessing that is found in relationship.

Into the fear of scarcity and the fear of never enough we need to hear Psalm 23's words of confidence and thanksgiving. Because the Lord is our shepherd we shall not want. Because we focus on God's presence with us, because we remember that all that we are and all that we have is a gift from God, because we remember that we are blessed to be a blessing, because we remember that life is sacred and good, because we trust in God and God's creation we can respond by sharing our life with others abundantly and generously.

When we see that we have enough – enough time, enough skill, enough resources, enough love, enough strength, enough beauty, enough money, enough...fill in the blank... we can see that we have more than enough and we can share life with others. When we see that we are enough we can live life fully in relationship trusting that we bless others and open our self to the blessing they share with us. God has filled the world with enough and we are called to share this life fully with one another.

For this week's spiritual practice we are invited to stand up against the tide and temptation of scarcity and celebrate God's abundance that fills our life and our world. This week I invite us to create an "appreciation inventory." Take a moment each day, pause and immerse yourself in all that God has given to you. It can be physical stuff like money and possessions or

nonphysical things like relationships and feelings, it can be big or small, just write something, at least one thing, that you have been given each day. God has given me, what? A friend who invites me out for coffee, bird song in the morning, a loved one, a sense of joy that met me in the midst of a difficult day, wisdom that something in my life needs to change, a fire deep down within that makes me stand on the side of justice, a pillow to rest my head on... As you fill out your inventory take time to look at and appreciate what you have written on your page.

When we can see that God has filled this world and our lives with goodness and abundance, when we can enter into the confidence and thanksgiving of Psalm 23, joining with one another in living and sharing the good news. We can work with God to bring healing and wholeness to this world as we share our lives with abundance and generosity. We become those people we celebrated at the beginning of the sermon, those who bless the lives of others each and every day.

God is our shepherd, God sets the table before us, surely goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our life. Friends, let us respond by sharing our life with gratitude and generosity. Amen. Thanks be to God.