

Kuhn Memorial Presbyterian Church
April 25, 2021
Good Shepherd Sunday

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements

***Call to Worship**

O Come let us worship and bow down.
Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.

**For the Lord is our God;
we are the Lord's people;
the flock that God shepherds.**

Prayer of the Day

**God of all power,
you called from death our Lord Jesus,
the great shepherd of the sheep.
Send us as shepherds to rescue the lost,
to heal the injured,
and to feed one another.
with knowledge and understanding.
through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

Hymn Great Is Thy Faithfulness

Text: Thomas O. Chisholm, 1923

Music: William Marion Runyan, 1923

Great is thy faithfulness, O God, my Father;
there is no shadow of turning with thee.
Thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not,
as thou hast been, thou forever wilt be.

Refrain

Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see.
All I have needed thy hand hath provided.
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord unto me!

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
sun, moon, and stars in their courses above,
join with all nature in manifold witness,
to thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love. *Refrain*

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide.
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
blessings all mine with ten thousand beside. *Refrain.*

Prayer of Confession

Merciful God,

**We confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done and what we have left undone.**

We have not loved you with our whole heart and mind and strength.

We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.

**In your mercy, forgive us, and call us back to your fold, that we may walk in your ways
and delight in your will, to the glory of your name.**

Response Take, O take me as I am, John Bell, 1995
 Summon out what I shall be.
 Set your seal upon my heart and live in me. *Repeat*

Assurance of Pardon

The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting.

I declare to you, in the name of Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven. Be at peace. Amen.

Time for Young Believers

Prayer of Illumination

Scripture Reading John 10:11-18

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd, and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep.

I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me. Just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”

Response The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

The Morning Message

I look forward to Good Shepherd Sunday each year. It gives me a chance to tell a couple of stories out of my own experience.

I share these in hopes that you will see that the Word of God is active and true all these many years since the Canon of Scripture was established in the fourth century. I share it because Psalm 23 is universally familiar and should be one of those scripture texts that we know by heart. And I share these stories because they demonstrate that the Gospel of Jesus Christ works in spite of our assumed differences in faith and practice.

The last year of my seminary study was spent at Cabell Huntington Hospital as an intern in Clinical Pastoral Education. Class was held every Tuesday from September through May. Twice a month the interns served a sixteen hour shift. Overnight. The only chaplain in the house.

It was a very challenging experience. No two nights were alike. And though I finished the program in 1999, I can't un-see or un-hear the most traumatic of events.

One night a nurse on a med-surg floor called me to come to her unit to provide some respite for her staff. They had an elderly patient with three significant issues: She had a serious staph infection. Do you remember MERSA? That's what she had. She had advanced dementia. She would not stay in her room, which put the others on her unit in danger of contracting MERSA. And, the third strike was she had no family members to stay with her. They needed help.

The nurse asked me to try to get her in bed and stay there for awhile. She hadn't slept much and she was becoming highly agitated. I agreed to give it a try.

I found the patient wandering around the room talking to herself. I looked around to see if there might be something- an object, a photograph, flowers, that would help break the ice. There were no personal belongings that I could find. But there was a bulletin board with a few colorful cards pinned to it.

So, I commented on the pretty cards. That caught her attention. I asked her if she wanted to look at them. She did. Then we read the messages and noted who they were from. They were all signed from Mary or John, your friend at such and such church. So we talked a little about church and the kindness of her friends.

That took all of ten minutes. She didn't appear ready for bed yet.

So, I said a prayer that I would find what is usually found in a bedside table in a hospital room...the Gideon Bible.

And I did. Thank you, Lord.

I asked her if she would like to hear some Bible passages and she enthusiastically said she would like that. I asked her what she wanted to hear and she said, “It doesn’t matter, honey. It’s all good.”

I helped her into bed and straightened the covers. We were making progress.

So, I started with Psalm 23. Very slowly and deliberately. She began to relax. A few verses later, she had pulled the blanket up to her chin. A few more and she seemed to slip down into the bend of the mattress. By the time I finished, her eyes were closed and she was softly snoring. So I kept reading...Psalm 24, 25, 26...until the room held a peaceful stillness.

A sense of the holy settled on that room and I was sure that for a few moments this woman, child of God, member of a community of faith, whose days were troubled by mental confusion, had found rest in the house of the Lord, if not forever, at least for the night.

What is it about this Psalm? It has a calming, reassuring effect each time it is read and heard.

I did a little research on that question this week.

Rev. Janet Hunt speaks of the years when she occasionally provided a short Sunday afternoon worship service at a local nursing home. She was sure it had little to no impact. The patients were all gathered in a common room with the kitchen nearby. It was hard to talk over the sound of dishes being washed. She had no microphone so she was almost shouting the whole time. The most noticeable reaction was that the patients usually fell asleep before she finished her message.

She says she finally quit competing with the noise and other hurdles and started reading the twenty-third Psalm. Every time. That was all. And, strangely, the noise from the kitchen diminished and she writes, “Eyes would suddenly brighten as God’s people in that place would mouth the words as I spoke them.”

Like I did that night at the hospital, she wondered why. These were not people who were raised on farms, their experience with sheep would be nil. So, what was it they tuned into? How were they actually participating when they usually nodded off?

She decided it could only have been their upbringing in the faith that made these words so dear to them. Perhaps they had learned the verses at their mother’s knee or on deep walks in the woods with their fathers.

Perhaps it was the image of Jesus tenderly carrying a lamb over his shoulder like a parent or grandparent would carry a tired child. Or maybe they recalled the story of shepherds in a field hearing the good news of God's Son being born in Bethlehem. Or maybe it was the Sunday school story of a shepherd boy becoming king.

Whatever it was, it was clear that by their final years, these words and images had become theirs. Even if they had never met a shepherd. Even if they had only encountered sheep from a distance. These words still speak.

When a crisis comes, or disaster strikes, I still turn to Psalm 23 for help. It reminds me that God is present with me. Even more than that, he leads me through dark valleys to safety. He fills me with good things. My soul is refreshed and strengthened. Even a confrontation with my adversaries can become a feast with the Lord as the host. And wherever my life takes me, my home is with God.

I have travelled a lot with Ed and his choirs. Early one morning, while on such a trip, there was a knock on our hotel room door. I opened it to find one of the parent volunteers who look utterly distraught. We asked him in and told us he had just received a call that his nephew, still a teenager, had attempted suicide. The man cried and cried. He was concerned for the boy and his parents and didn't know how to tell his own son who was on the trip.

We sat for awhile in silence. Then I reached into the drawer of the bedside table. There it was. The Gideon Bible. I turned to Psalm 23 and read, and continued to read until the tears had slowed down and it appeared we could turn to God in prayer.

We talked several times over the remainder of the trip. He was getting regular updates from home. Thankfully, a robust plan to address his nephew's issues had been put in place and everyone was breathing a little easier.

A few weeks later I ran into this good man in Kroger, somewhere between the olives and the crackers.

He looked ten years younger. His typical upbeat personality had returned. His nephew was doing well and the experience had been instructive for the whole family.

A question that had nagged at me since the trip made its way to my lips. This man's family members attend a free-tradition church out in a rural area of Cabell County. I was pretty sure there was no female leadership. I was equally sure he might be ridiculed for acknowledging me as a pastor. What possessed him to seek my counsel that terrible morning?

At that, he stepped back, threw open his arms and exclaimed, "You were all I had!"

With a huge dose of humility, I say, Amen.

***Affirmation of Faith** The Apostles' Creed
**I believe in God the Father almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord;
who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius
Pilate,
was crucified, dead and buried;
He descended into hell;
the third day he rose again from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Ghost;
the holy catholic church;
the communion of saints;
the forgiveness of sins;
the resurrection of the body;
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

Ascription of Praise Henry W. Greatorex, 1851
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost.
As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be.
World without end. Amen, Amen.

Joys and Concerns of the Church
Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

Presenting our Tithes and Offerings Please place your offering in the plates on the
Communion table at any time before or after the service. We will not pass them through the
congregation until safe to do so.

***Benediction**

*The King of Love, my shepherd is,
his goodness faileth never.
I nothing lack, for I am his,
and he is mine forever.*

Henry Williams Baker, 1868
Irish Melody

May it be so for all of you. Amen.

***Postlude**

Announcements

Elder of the Month Jon-Tyler Roach

Contributions for Cents and Sensibility may be placed on the Communion table alongside all other tithes and offerings.

News and articles for the church newsletter are always appreciated. Send your contributions to Jessica Kidd at kuhnmpc@gmail.com or call at 304-654-2218.