

Pray Without Ceasing

First Presbyterian Church, McAllen
Week of March 16 – March 22, 2020

Let Christ's peace reign in your hearts since, as members of one body, you have been called to that peace. Let the Word of Christ, rich as it is, dwell in you. And whatever you do, whether in speech or in action, do it in the name of Jesus our Savior, giving thanks to God through Christ.

Colossians 3: 15-17

A note from Rev. Kathryn Escandell, pastor of FPC McAllen:

In response to the threat posed by the spread of the novel coronavirus / Covid-19, FPC McAllen is currently supporting social distancing measures by refraining from gathering in the sanctuary for worship. My prayer is that even during this time spent apart in body, we will continue to be deeply connected in spirit to one another and to our Lord.

These pages include resources which offer an “alternative worship experience”, based on the lectionary Scriptures for March 22, for individuals or families to use at home. Use them in whatever way you find helpful.

I pray that these words, images, and ideas will be for you a path toward the peace and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Opening Sentences

In life and in death we belong to God.

Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,

and the communion of the Holy Spirit,
we trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel,
whom alone we worship and serve.

A Brief Statement of Faith, lines 1-6

A Prayer for Illumination

Lord Christ, open our eyes
to see clearly the light of the world.
Holy Spirit, illumine our minds
to perceive God's glory shining among us.
Almighty God, prepare our hearts
to see, to trust, to worship the Messiah.



A Reading from the Psalms:

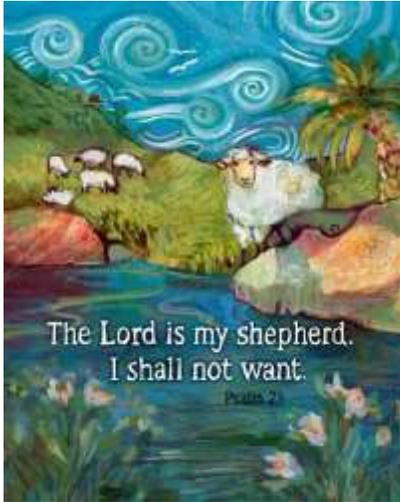
Psalm 23 – *three translations*

The LORD is my shepherd;
I shall not want.
He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters.
He restores my soul;
He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.

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 runs over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the LORD
Forever.

New King James Version



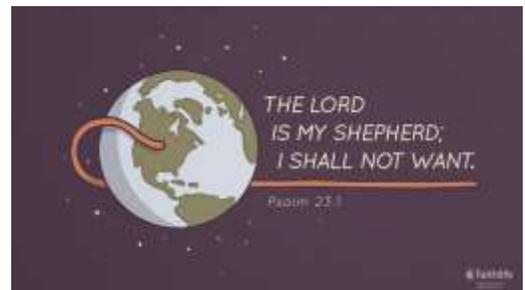
YHWH, you are my shepherd – I want nothing more.
You let me lie down in green meadows;
you lead me beside restful waters;
you refresh my soul.
You guide me to lush pastures for the sake of your Name.
Even if I'm surrounded by the shadows of Death,
I fear no danger, for you are with me.
Your rod and your 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.

Inclusive Bible

God, my shepherd!
I don't need a thing.
You have bedded me down in lush meadows,
you find me quiet pools to drink from.
True to your word,
you let me catch my breath
and send me in the right direction.

Even when the way goes through Death Valley,
I'm not afraid when you walk at my side.
Your trusty shepherd's crook makes me feel secure.

You serve me a six-course dinner
right in front of my enemies.
You revive my drooping head;
my cup brims with blessing.
Your beauty and love chase after me every day of my life.
I'm back home in the house of God
for the rest of my life.

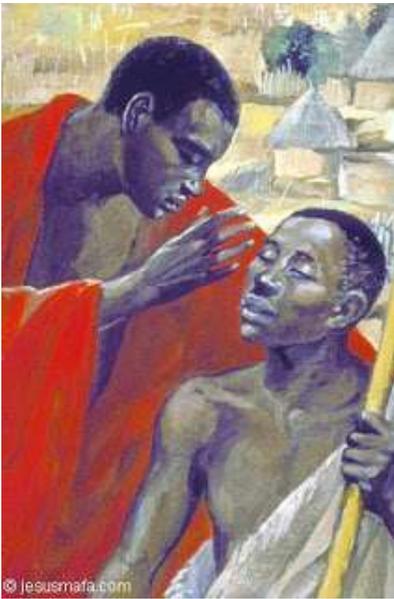


The Message

Prayer Practice: Rewrite Psalm 23 in your own words, giving thanks for the ways God protects and nourishes you. Use words or images. OR – If you are feeling vulnerable at this moment, use your Psalm to **ask** God to protect you in very specific ways.

A Reading from the Gospels

John 9: 1-41 (NRSV)



As Jesus walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’ ³ Jesus answered, ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. ⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.’ ⁶ When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, ⁷ saying to him, ‘Go, wash in the pool of Siloam’ (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. ⁸ The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, ‘Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?’ ⁹

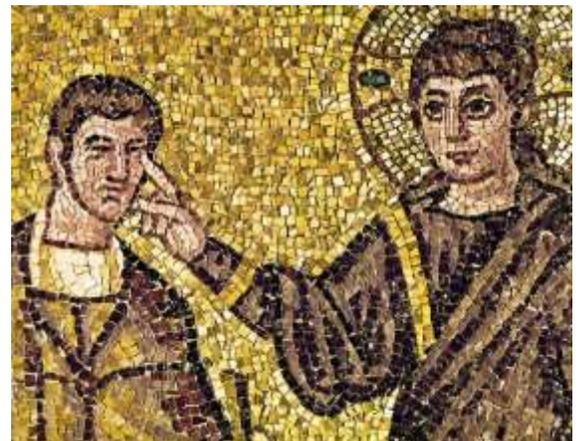
Some were saying, ‘It is he.’ Others were saying, ‘No, but it is someone like him.’ He kept saying, ‘I am the man.’ ¹⁰ But they kept asking him, ‘Then how were your eyes opened?’ ¹¹ He answered, ‘The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, “Go to Siloam and wash.” Then I went and washed and received my sight.’ ¹² They said to him, ‘Where is he?’ He said, ‘I do not know.’

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴ Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, ‘He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.’ ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, ‘This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.’ But others said, ‘How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?’ And they were divided. ¹⁷ So they said again to the blind man, ‘What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.’ He said, ‘He is a prophet.’

¹⁸ The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹ and asked them, 'Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?' ²⁰ His parents answered, 'We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; ²¹ but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.' ²² His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³ Therefore his parents said, 'He is of age; ask him.'

²⁴ So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, 'Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.' ²⁵ He answered, 'I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.' ²⁶ They said to him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?' ²⁷ He answered them, 'I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?' ²⁸ Then they reviled him, saying, 'You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.' ³⁰ The man answered, 'Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but God does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. ³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.' ³⁴ They answered him, 'You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?' And they drove him out.

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' ³⁶ He answered, And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.' ³⁷ Jesus said to him, 'You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.' ³⁸ He said, 'Lord, I believe.' And he worshiped him. ³⁹ Jesus said, 'I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.' ⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, 'Surely we are not blind, are we?' ⁴¹ Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind you would not have sin. But now that you say, "We see", your sin remains.'



The Word of the Lord / Thanks be to God.

A Reflection about Sight

from *The Story of My Life* by Helen Keller

We walked down the path to the well-house, attracted by the fragrance of the honeysuckle with which it was covered. Someone was drawing water and my teacher placed my hand under the spout. As the cool stream gushed over one hand, she spelled into the other the word water, first slowly, then rapidly. I stood still, my whole attention fixed upon the motions of her fingers. Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten – a thrill of returning thought; and somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me. I knew then that “w-a-t-e-r” meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free! There were barriers still, it is true, but barriers that could in time be swept away.

I left the well-house eager to learn. Everything had a name, and each name gave birth to a new thought. As we returned to the house every object which I touched seemed to quiver with life. That was because I saw everything with the strange, new sight that had come to me ... I learned a great many new words that day. I do not remember what they all were; but I do know that *mother*, *father*, *sister*, *teacher* were among them – words that were to make the world blossom for me, “like Aaron’s rod, with flowers.” It would have been difficult to find a happier child than I was as I lay in my crib at the close of that eventful day and lived over the joys it had brought me, and for the first time longed for a new day to come. (pp. 23-24)



A prayer from the 223rd GA Co-Moderators

Vilmarie Cintrón-Olivieri and the Rev. Cindy Kohlmann - March 16, 2020

Eternal God, sustainer, provider, God of all wisdom and knowledge,
Our spirits are weary, our faith quivers, our minds get clouded by news of sickness and death.

You know our thoughts before we express them, even the fears we dismiss, you know them.
We cannot hide our feelings and worries from you.

So, as we are, we come to You, O God, asking for wisdom, for clear minds and open hearts,
for calm

and assurance that, through the crisis, You are present.

Knowing that “the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought,

but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words,”

We ask for wisdom and protection...

For medical personnel, scientists, doctors, nurses, and laboratory technicians.

For those around the world considering current and other health crises.

For health care personnel and caregivers.

We lift them up to You. Bendíceles con sabiduría; protégeles de todo mal.

We ask for clear minds and open hearts as people navigate daily lives...

As closures, cancellations, and quarantines are enacted.

As families gather in their homes, some caring for those who are sick.

As we encounter neighbors in our neighborhoods, stores, and pharmacies.

Bendícenos con paciencia y creatividad, amor y entendimiento.

We pray for the sick, those who have lost or are at risk of losing jobs in the midst of this crisis,
for those whose health or social services will be or have been affected, for those suffering the direct

effects of this virus, locally and around the world.

Illumine us, Holy Spirit. Show us in what ways we can be of help as we care for self and others.

Ilumínanos para saber cómo ayudar.

We ask for calm, assurance, and strength.

May we all remember that, in the midst of any crisis,

Your grace reaches us,

Your hope enlightens us,

And Your love surrounds us all.

En medio de la crisis,

tu gracia nos alcanza,

tu esperanza nos ilumina,

y tu amor nos rodea. Amén.

Closing Words

God does not see as mortals see.
We look on the outward appearance;
God looks on the heart.
Jesus, Light of the World,
give us eyes to see as you see!
Once we lived in darkness, but now –
as children of light, we are called
to what is good and right and true.
Jesus, Light of the World,
give us eyes to see as you see!



Blessing

May the love of God pursue you,
the light of Christ enfold you,
and the Holy Spirit keep you;
as you dwell in the house of the Lord
your whole life long. Amen.

Please note:

The Session will meet on Tuesday, March 24 using a combination of presence and technology. We will be discussing ways for FPC McAllen to remain strong and connected during the coming weeks. We want to know how we can best support you at this time, so please stay in touch. You can reach me any time at 512-466-5662 or fpcpastorkathy@gmail.com.

I expect that alternative worship services will continue for several weeks. I will prepare a packet for each week we do not worship in the sanctuary. Please let me know if there are particular resources you would like to have included in these packets; if you would like them to be longer/ shorter; more / less interactive; lectionary-based / thematic / seasonal. I would appreciate your feedback so that that I can provide you with a resource you find meaningful and helpful.

Blessings to each of you this week and always – *Pastor Kathy*