

Prepare for worship- Sit in silence or with soft music for a few moments

Opening Prayer:

Visionary creator, give us your vision. Show us our hearts, our homes, our community, and our world through your eyes. Wash away our blind spots and help us to see where we do not see. Allow us to see creation as you see it now, and as you envision it to become. Help us to realize your vision and walk the road of life - the way and path of Jesus. Amen

Hymn- *Sweet, Sweet Spirit*

There's a sweet, sweet Spirit in this place,
and I know that it's the Spirit of the Lord;
there are sweet expressions on each face,
and I know they feel the presence of the Lord.

Sweet Holy Spirit, sweet heavenly Dove,
stay right here with us, filling us with your love;
and for these blessings we lift our hearts in praise;
without a doubt we'll know that we have been revived
when we shall leave this place

Prayer of Illumination:

Open our ears that we may hear, and our hearts and minds
that we may receive your word O Lord our rock and redeemer.

Old Testament Reading- 1 Samuel 16: 1-13

Take a moment to meditate: God sees the heart and not the outer appearance.

New Testament Reading- Ephesians 5: 8-14

Take a moment to meditate: what it means to be a child of light.

Gospel Reading- John 9: 1-41

Take a moment to meditate: are there any ways in which you need to be healed of blindness

Psalm 23

Sermon- Through the Dark Valley

Affirmation of Faith- Apostle's Creed

Prayer-

Divine Shepherd, in this time of uncertainty, we remember that you lead us through the dark valleys. We remember that you lead us to green pastures and still waters. Forgive us of those times that we have not followed you through but remained in the darkness. Open our eyes that we may see your light even in our darkness. This we know through your shepherd son, Jesus, who taught us to pray.

The Lord's Prayer.

Song- God Be With You till We Meet Again

God be with you till we meet again;
by his counsels guide, uphold you,
with his sheep securely fold you;
God be with you till we meet again.

Benediction:

Go forth following the lead of our divine shepherd who leads us through the darkness to the light. Amen

Psalm 23

It feels that we are in a dark valley as we deal with this new disease, COVID-19. We are in a dark valley of uncertainty as we do not know much about this disease, except that it spreads rapidly and is deadly to some. It is nearly impossible to keep up with the number of cases. We are in a dark valley of this disease; it may even feel like a valley of death.

But it is somehow mysterious that during this time that we are in this dark valley that this most familiar of the Psalms is the Lectionary Psalter for this Sunday. This Sunday when you are watching this on Facebook or our webpage, or perhaps reading these words, rather than being here in this sanctuary, we hear these words.

The LORD is my Shepherd.

It is the LORD that is our shepherd, our guide. Even though we may express our faith in different ways, we can have faith in our divine shepherd.

He gives green pastures, still waters, a restored soul.

The divine shepherd gives us only that which is good for us. The divine shepherd gives us what we need to live and to thrive.

The LORD is with me even through the darkest valley.

Sometimes in search of green pastures and still waters, the shepherd may need to move the flock to a new pasture. This may involve leading them through a valley. In Israel these valleys may be through deep clefts between mountains. Clefts where the sides are so steep and deep that the sun may not shine into them except when directly overhead. These dark valleys would be perfect for robbers to hide, so, yes, they could be valleys of death.

But even as we walk through the dark valley, You, The LORD, are with me.

This my friends is the central point of this Psalm and the key word is through. When I read this Psalm at funerals I always emphasize this word to remind us that THE LORD will walk with us through grief, and not leave us in grief. The Psalmist

reminds us that the Divine Shepherd walks with us through the valley and does not leave us in the valley.

In our lifetimes we can recall many times when it seemed that creation, our nation and society were in a dark valley- the Great Depression, World War II, the escalation of Atomic Weapons and the Cold War, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Vietnam War, Watergate, the Polio epidemic of 1955, the HIV/AIDS epidemic of the early 80's, 9/11, the recession of 2008. All these times that we or our parents and grandparents can remember were dark valleys.

But we did not stay in any of those valleys. The divine Shepherd led us through those valleys, in some cases to greener pastures. From the polio epidemic of 1955 there came a vaccine that was widely used; many of us remember getting that sugar cube. And with other diseases there are vaccines developed so that many diseases which were so common and deadly are less common and less severe.

So, though we may be in a dark valley at this time, we must remember that we have a divine shepherd that will get us through this valley. We must have faith that the divine shepherd will get us through this valley to greener pastures and still waters. We must remember that the divine shepherd will restore us to normalcy.

Even as we are to maintain social distancing, there are ways in which we can walk with each other during this time. We may not be able to have physical contact but we can maintain contact by calling on the phone, particularly those that are already isolated. We can reach out to those who may be economically impacted by this situation and make donations to our food banks. We can give blood. We can write notes and letters to others.

As families, we can be together. Watch movies together. Play games with your children. Read books together. Let this be a time to come together as a family rather than running in different directions.

It is also interesting that this occurs during our season of Lent. This may be a time as we curtail many activities, to take time to read, study and reflect upon God's word. It may be a time of Sabbath as we are removed from the wheels of production in order to commune with God.

Even as we are in this dark valley, we do have a divine shepherd who will lead us through this valley. There will be a time in the future when we will come together in this sanctuary to worship and give thanks to our divine shepherd for leading us through this valley.