

**Lectionary 16 – Year B**  
**July 21, 2024 – Grace Lutheran Champaign**  
**Pastor Janet Lepp**

Readings: Jeremiah 23:1-6, Psalm 23, Ephesians 2:11-22, Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

Psalm 23 – our psalm for today – is a favorite for many of us.

Recently I found this beautiful version of Psalm 23 – as translated from Hebrew by Rabbi Pamela Greenberg.

I offer this translation as a prayer for us this morning.

*Psalm 23: God is my shepherd; there is nothing I lack.*

*You lay me down in lush meadows.*

*You guide me toward tranquil waters, reviving my soul.*

*You lead me down paths of righteousness, for that is your way.*

*And when I walk through the valley, overshadowed by death, I will fear no harm, for you are with me.*

*Your rod and staff – they comfort me.*

*You spread a table before me*

*In the face of my greatest fears.*

*You drench my head with oil;*

*My cup overflows the brim.*

*Surely goodness and kindness*

*Will accompany me all the days of my life*

*And I will dwell in the house of the Holy for the length of my days. Amen.*

In today's story from the Gospel of Mark the disciples have gathered around Jesus like sheep around a shepherd. Jesus had sent his disciples out in pairs to go among the villages and throughout the countryside carrying out ministry in his name; casting out demons, healing the sick, and proclaiming the Kingdom of God in their midst. And now that they were back, they told Jesus all they had done and taught. Jesus listened to them. Did he sense their exhaustion or know their spirits were weary? Because when they were finished he said to them: Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while. It was an invitation given to them in love. Jesus doesn't say to them "Go away for a while and rest." He says: Come away and rest. Come to me and rest. I'm not sure what those disciples were thinking at the time, but as I hear these words of invitation from Jesus I want to plop down right next to him and experience the joy and peace he has to offer for the renewal of my own weary spirit.

Here we are – in the midst of summer, which I always hope will be a time of rest and restoration. But already the stores are putting their school supplies on display as the days pass by quickly and registration for after school programs is happening. It was about this time of year. Dan and I were living in Rockford.

When the Superintendent of Schools wrote a letter to the members of the Rockford community.

He reminded everyone that school would be starting within the next month and he wanted it to be a good year. He wrote that many opportunities for learning and growth would be offered at each school and he gave words of encouragement to the students, and their parents, and community members, asking everyone to do their very best to make the upcoming educational year a success.

He wrote: For effective learning to happen, students need to do 4 things. Then he gave this list: 1. Show up 2. Bring the necessary items for class 3. Get along with others 4. Listen to the teacher and do what the teacher says. I read over that list. Read it again. And then was left wondering; Why did the Superintendent draw the bar for success so LOW? Where is the wisdom in that? Yet – here we are today some years later, and I still remember that list. Along the way I have come to understand there is more wisdom in those 4 steps than I had understood at first. Wisdom, not just for the schools at all the many levels of education including University training, but wisdom in other areas of our lives, too – including our lives as Christians. Think about the story we just heard about Jesus and his disciples. After returning from their trip, Jesus gave them an invitation to come away/by yourselves/rest a while. But as they found out, his clear and simple directions were not so clear and simple to carry out because when they crossed the lake and moored their boat, people immediately began rushing to them. When we hear these words of Jesus as an invitation to us I think we also discover it's not so

simple to do. All the distractions and interruptions; things that get in the way of time spent resting with Jesus. That's when I find the Superintendent's list helpful.

**Step 1. Is to 'Show up.'**

Spiritual directors and teachers of prayer say that to show up for prayer or meditation or restful walks and talks mean that transformation and renewal have already begun. Just by showing up. And just showing up for worship, like we have today, takes us away from the busyness of life and gives us time and space to allow Christ's Spirit to enter our minds and hearts and spirits through hearing the words of Scripture, receiving Holy Communion, singing and praying all in the presence of other caring Christians.

**Step 2. Bring the necessary items.**

When we show up there are things that are helpful to bring. Things such as... Open minds and caring hearts and listening ears. We bring our hands and feet and voices for praise, for witness, for service. But dare I say that there are other things we should be bringing; those things we need to hand over to God such as all our hurts and sins, our anger, fears and pain, worry; all the things that rob us of abundant life. In some congregations there is the practice of walking to the baptismal font and dipping a finger into the water and then making the sign of the cross, just like at the time of baptism. I like to imagine that when the hand reaches forward, the junk which is cluttering up life is dropped into the water to drown and then the water of life touches me in the name of Jesus Christ who offers forgiveness and newness of life.

**Step 3. Get along with others.**

Even though we may think that we can do things by ourselves, none of us can survive alone. All of humanity – all of creation exists in an interconnected web of relationships. Even the very nature of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit exists in community. Note how Jesus in his invitation uses the plural; Come away by yourselves. Getting along with others can be hard work. We are witnesses of all the grief and hatred and anxiety that can happen when people do not get along, especially those who live together in the same home or community or country and find themselves in opposite corners. When Jesus invites us to come away we enter into his eternal loving embrace and are held in his heart. And who else do we find there in the heart of Christ? Or a better question may be who is he not holding in love? To get along with others in all their diversity and seeking the welfare of each other, all happens in and through Christ.

**Step 4. Listen to the teacher**

Our teacher is Jesus. Jesus teaches us about who God is, what God is like, and what God's presence means for the world. Because Jesus is the embodiment of God's wisdom and love and divine essence, his life of loving and serving others, even those we don't like, is the most profound and life-changing teaching ever!

As we take a break from our lives and 'come away' here to worship, we pray that we may find some rest, some peace of mind, and the rejuvenation of our battered and very weary spirits. There has been so much coming at us during the week – some of it exciting – much of it worrisome. There are many important and life-changing issues confronting us and requiring action. And in spite of the goodness in our world, there is so much fear-mongering and doomsday predictions.

Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while, Jesus said to his weary disciples, AND Jesus says to us too! This is what I hear Jesus telling us today: Come away to rest in me – in a relationship of trust and love. My being close to you – gives you life!

And be sure to bring everything you think you need with you because out of compassion I will help you sort through all the good and all the bad – and I will offer forgiveness and mercy to transform despair into hope. Others will be with you too, so you can provide mutual support for each other. Your life will be more complete – more whole – when you journey with others and me right there with you.

And don't forget, "I am with you always even to the end of the age." Listen to me and I will teach you about my unending love which I will help you share with the world.