



still waters

home church studies

Psalm 23

[Worship]

1 The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.
2 He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; 3 he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. 4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me. 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.

Consider:

[Words]

The world believes that we are finally in the grip of death. We spend our frightened energy trying to stay young and be healthy. We use our money to secure our existence. We work frantically to establish our worth. We are propelled by fearfulness that evokes violence and produces policies of aggression and militarism.

Against that, these texts assert Jesus offers a way of “eternal life” that puts us out of the reach of deathliness. By “eternal life” the church means the full and final establishment of our worth, our identity, and our destiny in God’s rule.

The readings mediate on God’s power for life. Psalm 23 voices confidence in the protector who “restores my life” in the danger zones of hostility and threat. God leads “beside still waters,” an image picked up at the end of the great doxology in Revelation 7:17 where the good shepherd will finally prevail.

Between the ancient psalm and the sweeping doxology is the story of Peter restoring life to Dorcas. In his utterance, Peter reiterates the earlier command of Jesus in Mark 5:41 (Acts 9:40). This sequence of texts attests that God has entrusted to the church the capacity to defy death and evoke life. Imagine a world peopled by those unafraid of death. Those who join this narrative may cease to be “arms dealers” and become gift givers who share the water of life.

—Walter Brueggemann

[Scripture]

Revelation 7.9-17

9 After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. 10 They cried out in a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!" 11 And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12 singing, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen." 13 Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?" 14 I said to him, "Sir, you are the one that knows." Then he said to me, "These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. 16 They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; 17 for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Question:

As we re-read Jesus’ revelation in terms of the apocalyptic language employed, our cultural and learned veneer can be challenged to an uncomfortable decisional breaking-point, just as Judaism, Saul and those wanting to be freed from “Suspense.” After all, our “belief” is on the line...

How do we reflect the psalm 23 kingdom, both personally, and as a church body in light of this re-thinking and challenge to our traditional understanding of Gospel?

Also, read for yourself this week,

John 10.22-30 & Acts 9.36-43,