

He Leadeth Me Beside the Still Waters
The Fourth Sunday in Lent
Sunday, March 22, 2020
The Rev. Paul McLain

“He leadeth me beside the still waters.” In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

My father died when I was 23 years old. In addition to feeling deep grief, the immediate responsibility of running the family construction and building supply business fell to me and my brother, who was 21 at the time. We also needed to look after my mother and two younger siblings. I felt like the whole world had crashed in around me.

A couple of memories stand out for me from that time. The first is that every time I turned around, at the funeral home, at my mother's house, wherever I was, a woman who was a family friend, handed me a fresh glass of water. I was so numb and in such a fog that, at first, I didn't notice it. But later I did. And weeks later, I thanked her for it. She said, “Paul, I had heard that persons who have experienced a tremendous shock and trauma need to drink lots of water to soothe their bodies and souls. I just decided to take it upon myself to make sure you always had plenty of water.”

The second thing I remember is that, shortly after my Dad's death, the pastor of our church began a sermon series on the 23rd Psalm. He vividly brought to life the images of green pastures and still waters, for which my mind, body, and soul desperately longed. Those constant glasses of water and the words and images of the 23rd Psalm were the ways that a loving and caring God, a kind and thoughtful neighbor, and a sensitive and insightful pastor got me through the valley of the shadow of death.

We're in that valley now. And, for the first time in memory, we're all in it together. Even more than 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina, we are all directly affected. We are being called to make sacrifices and changes in our lives that we never envisioned, including the manner in which we worship today. Technology, which has often been a form of distraction from genuine conversations, is now our lifeline. Even in this time of social distancing, there have been some new sparks of light.

During our first-ever Baguette Brothers videoconference Bible study, one of our brothers shared that he had spoken by phone this week with someone he had not talked to in 35 years. The two of them had a long, deep, and healing conversation. As our pastoral care teams made check-in calls this week, one parishioner shared that she knew a fellow parishioner only by her face and where she sat in church. When she called her, the two of them had a long conversation filled with fun, mutual interests, and the sheer joy of a budding new friendship. And, our growing group of millennials at Calvary have stepped up by offering to make grocery or pharmacy deliveries for seniors and others, and even talk and troubleshoot folks through all this new technology. We've heard from a friend in Little Rock, who has made it her mission to call at least two persons outside her immediate social circle each day.

But perhaps the best things going right now are Judy and Shannon Tucker's mother-and-son mini-piano concerts on Facebook. While Shannon's page turning is not quite in the league of John Denton, Judy's singing and playing is extraordinary. Her rendition of "Edelweiss" may singlehandedly get us through this crisis.

In the 23rd Psalm, a present reality and a future hope are not distant from one another. They are one at the same time and in the same place. While we're walking through the valley of the shadow of death, the present reality, we can do so without fear because God, our Good Shepherd, is leading us through it. God has not abandoned us. Far from it. God, instead, is taking us to the green pastures and is calming and refreshing us with the still waters. God overcomes this present darkness with future hope, that ultimately becomes a present hope.

And God invites us to be part of offering that hope – through every phone call, every card or note, every email or text, every videoconference Bible study, every heartfelt prayer. Near the end of the Psalm are these words, "My cup runneth over." This reminds us that, even in this time of social distancing, we are still blessed with an abundance of social capital. We have so much love to offer one another! We have so much love to offer a whole world that needs it. Never has the Church needed to be the Church more than now.

How do we help the restaurant servers going without tips? How do we support the healthcare workers on the front lines of this crisis, who are running out of masks and gloves? How do we help the many musicians in our city without gigs? How do we help the travel, tourism, and other workers who are being laid off? How do we feed, clothe, and give shelter to our most vulnerable downtown neighbors during this time?

I don't have answers to those and more questions. I do know they're some of the right questions to ask. And we're asking them and living them right now. It is going to take our collective wisdom, creativity, and imagination to begin to answer them. God is in that wisdom, creativity, and imagination, too.

One of the graces we offer in Morning Prayer is: "Glory to God, whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine: Glory to him from generation to generation in the Church, and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever."

At the darkest moment in my life, my neighbor refreshed me with glass after glass of water. God worked through her to restore my soul. At this moment, God is working through us to refresh one another and refresh our world from the overflowing springs of still waters in all our hearts.
Amen.