

Words Forming Witnesses

**Psalm 23 & Proverbs 3:5-8
(Hymns – 11, 691, 462, 675)
April 14, 2013**

God's Redemption

We watched in horror this week
as bombs exploded in Boston.

More horror assaulted our senses
as a fertilizer plant exploded in Texas.

In other places around the world, more horrible things happened.
7 Palestinians were killed.
Bombs killed 55 in Iraq.
There were 32 other random deaths in that country.
12 people died in Afghanistan.
Countless others died of countless other human acts
in countless other places.

How do we understand and respond these horrible human actions?

It's a complex and challenging question.

My perception, still being shaped,
is that our standard response is one of fear and anger.
Most often, that leads to a desire for revenge.
Revenge is taken through more violent acts,
creating more human horror,
generating a self-perpetuating cycle of violence meeting violence.
We see it in our movies, our TV shows, our professional sports teams,
our video games, and our books –
fear, anger, and violence begetting more fear, anger, and violence.

That's what life too often looks like through human eyes
and how we too often respond relying on our own insights.
We even find justification for such revenge
in our religious traditions,
demonizing those who do not agree with us.

But what does all of this look like from God's perspective?

That's the challenge, it seems to me, that this text presents to us
in the midst of the week that was.

The text is from Proverbs,
a compilation of wisdom sayings from the Jewish tradition.
It's focused on how to live a faithful life,
how to flourish in companionship with the God
who calls us to be a blessing in the world.

This passage emphasizes the importance from seeing things
from God's perspective, not simple from our own.

Using our eyes and insights alone creates a false sense of wisdom,
one that is narrow and clouded and distorted.

Using our eyes and insights alone,
we too often construct a world that is divided and at war.
We see things, as we have seen all too often this week,
through the lenses of fear, and anger, and revenge.
We put our trust in ourselves and those who are like us.
Those who are different from us are enemies, to be eliminated.

Letting God shape our way of seeing the world
creates a radically new perspective.
Trusting in God with all our being –
with head, heart, gut, and body –
is healing and refreshing.

Our distorted and defensive attitudes and behaviours are challenged.
An alternative vision of what it means to be human emerges.
When we acknowledge the presence and power of God –
seen especially clearly in the way he lived among us in Jesus Christ –
we become increasingly aware of
the healing and refreshing power of being a blessing in the world.

Blessedness in the Old Testament, and the New,
is fullness of life and relates to such things as relationships,
beauty, honour, wisdom, and piety.
Humans share in blessedness because they are blessed by God.
An essential part of that blessedness is to be blessings to others,
to consciously and consistently enter into relationships
that nourish healing and refreshing,
that helps others flourish in a world-wide community of well-being.
That's the Biblical standard of *Shalom*.
In Jesus' teaching, it's the Kingdom of God.

Few passages in the Bible capture that blessed relationship
better than Psalm 23 that we read and sang this morning.

Jeff Loach, a fellow Presbyterian minister,
posted this take on the 23rd Psalm this week on Facebook.
It's from the Canadian Bible Society.

The 23rd Psalm Explained

The Lord is my Shepherd — *that's Relationship!*

I shall not want — *that's Supply!*

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures

— *that's Rest!*

He leadeth me beside the still waters

— *that's Refreshment!*

He restoreth my soul — *that's Healing!*

He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness

— *that's Guidance!*

For His name sake — *that's Purpose!*

Yea, though I walk through the valley of

the shadow of death — *that's Testing!*

I will fear no evil — *that's Protection!*

For Thou art with me — *that's Faithfulness!*

Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me

— *that's Discipline!*

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of

mine enemies — *that's Hope!*

Thou annointest my head with oil

— *that's Consecration!*

My cup runneth over — *that's Abundance!*

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me

all the days of my life — *that's Blessing!*

And I will dwell in the house of the Lord

— *that's Security!*

Forever — *that's Eternity!*

— *Anonymous*

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Security and protection are not found in fear and violence.
They are not found in domination and control.
They are not found in the insights and responses we generate on our own.

They are found in a faithful relationship with the Holy Trinity –
the Father who creates, the Son who redeems, and the Spirit who sustains.

That faith will be tested
in a world where humans are free to go it alone,
free to seek security and protection in fear and violence.

That's why trusting the Lord with all you heart is so important.
That is our ultimate, indeed only, source of real security and protection.
And remember, when the Hebrew Scriptures use the word *heart*,
they are really referring to the core and centre of our beings,
to that source of energy around and within us
that gives us the power to flourish in grace.

When we see things from God's perspective,
when we re-deem the way we view the world,
we become capable of being the blessings God created us to be.
Our paths become straight, our flesh becomes healing,
and our bodies serve as refreshment for others and ourselves.

In a world filled with the kind of horror we have seen this week,
that witness to a different way of seeing the world,
a different way of being in the world, is increasingly important.
In relationship with God,
made possible by the gift of healing and refreshing life
that he gave us in Jesus Christ
and makes real for us in the work of the Holy Spirit,
we can see different possibilities
for responding to fear and anger and violence.

We can become not only the helpers who heal,
but the prophets who offer an alternative way
and the sages who envision a better path.

Each of us,
in our own ways, in our own situations, with our own talents,
live with God in Jesus Christ through the blessing of the Spirit
to bless this world with healing and refreshment.

Written and preached by the Rev. Dr. Brian Fraser
Minister with Brentwood Presbyterian Church
Burnaby, BC
www.brentwoodpc.ca