

Notes for Brian's Sermon at Brentwood Presbyterian Church

Sun, Sept 16, 2018

**How Does God Restore Our Souls? – Love/Adoration
(Psalm 23)**



**He makes me lie down in green pastures; he
leads me beside still waters;
he restores my soul.
(Ps 23)**

A lesson from the psalm

In the midst of all the images I found this week picturing a white, bearded, squeaky-clean, drop-dead gorgeous Jesus tenderly holding a lamb as the best portrayal of what Psalm 23 is talking about, this is the one that fascinated and provoked me most – it's probably a lot closer to the reality, either for the composers of the psalm or for Jesus, who may very well have spent some of those 30 years we know so little about tending sheep among the poor in the disrupted social conditions of rural Galilee – small, struggling herds in a dry and dangerous terrain essential for providing food and clothing to the people – that's a more realistic context for considering these words – and it might help us hear them afresh with a transformative power – let's see

Provocative points to ponder

- My addiction to alliteration ran rampant this week – so, in these provocative points to ponder, there are three more Ps – this psalm is about purpose, provision, and protection – when we talked about the psalm on Friday night at Bible Study, what endeared us first and foremost about its imagery and message were the assurances of God's provision for us and protection of us – provision for every need – physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual – a generosity that draws forth a gratitude that infuses our whole being – that's the dynamic relationship, the constant interchange, that lies at the heart of our faith – generosity and gratitude – it's like the basic rhythm of the universe – and when we rebel against the gratitude part, things get messed up – but, to our eternal benefit, God's steadfast love that provides the generosity endures forever – there's that 'soulworm' again!
- But look at the end of the psalm – at the stuff about the banquet (protection for a party in the midst of danger), and the healing (that's one of the main things oil was used for back then), and the quality of life God provides (goodness and mercy in the face of enemies seek harm and vengeance), and the closeness with God in which it's all grounded (the temple as God's house) – these are all practices of the faith that equip people to go into the world and bless it in God's name – I didn't find much about that in the commentaries this week, but we thought that was a crucial part of the message of the psalm in our considerations on Friday night – provision and protection for the purpose of serving God's Commonwealth – without that clear sense of God's purpose informing all of this, it's easy to skew the provision and protection into something that's simply about our well-being – our narrow sense of our own needs - and that's not the Gospel

Finding this in God's living Word, Jesus Christ

- Consider it this way – there is a stream of thinking in the New Testament witness to how God is working in Jesus Christ that sees Jesus replacing the temple as the focus for our relationship with God – Paul's language is that we are now 'in Christ' – ponder that for a moment – not simply 'with,' but 'in' – within and part of 'the body of Christ' – another powerful image Paul uses to help his colleagues in the church understand the intimate depths of the relationship God has provided that protects so fully as they grow into God's purpose for them – to be in our circles of influence what Jesus was in his – an embodiment of justice, kindness, and humility, all for the healing of the creation
- The answer to the sermon's question this morning, then, is this – God restores our souls by continually teaching us more and more about the purpose for which we were created = to cultivate the well-being of our creation – and by assuring us in every fibre of our being that we are provided for and protected in pursuing that purpose – so, assurance of purpose, provision, and protection - that assurance will put a song in your souls – but that's for next week, when we consider the call of Ps 100

Your Notes

Prayers of the people offering thanks, seeking help, and being awed

*[The form and flow of thanks, help, and awe is taken from Anne Lamott's wonderful little book on prayer, **Help, Thanks, Wow: The Three Essential Prayers** (New York: Riverhead Books, 2012).]*