

Be guided to still waters

Psalm 23; John 9:1-41

The Psalmist writes, '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.' The Psalmist asks us to fear no evil. Jesus always is asking us to be not afraid. And if you're like me you have been feeling afraid, you have been feeling anxious, you have had moments of comfort and joy and you have had moments of distress. We are in a time full of both the chaos of the unknowns and faith: the rod and the staff are guiding us.

Our health officials have let us know how to help the most vulnerable among us. This is often a huge task with a myriad of things we must do. Currently the best things we can do for one another is to remain, to remain at home, to reframe how we go to work and being safe while we're there, to trust in food supplies and to go to the grocery store infrequently. God has also been with us, guiding and loving us. God is challenging us to keep central a faith that says, "fear no evil, for I am with you."

We all will have different environments around us at this time. For some of us, we are either alone or with one or two other people in our homes. Some of those people are even actually in two worlds, one feeling sick in one room, and the others in the other rooms trying to keep everything clean.

Now others of you, of course, are surrounded by people with whom you don't usually spend the whole day. You may have children or a grandparent who has come to be with you at this time. Perhaps a spouse who usually is at work all day is home and for you this is startling. The energy in your house may be overwhelming. All of us will also be having different responses and reactions to all of this.

Sometimes, we will be like the man who encountered Jesus. We will hear the instructions and follow them, not because they make sense but because of the *source* of the instructions. So, we will stay home or go to work and wash our hands all the time. We will go for a walk and cross the street to the other side when other folks are coming to keep our physical distance. We will keep up with the latest information while trying not to get inundated with too much information. The rod and the staff are guiding us.

And there will be times when someone around you (or you) will be like a pharisee:

- well you tell me that this has happened, but this can't really happen can it?
- It can't be this good or this bad.
- I can't be as vulnerable as you think I am.
- I am definitely not strong enough to stay home alone for this long.

We all respond differently to these kinds of situations. And all the different ways you are responding, and reacting are normal. They are okay. Your feelings arising are the feelings arriving. Jesus never said don't *feel* afraid. As I said last week, Jesus said, "Do not *be* afraid." You will feel fear along with a myriad of other emotions in the coming days. While respecting those feelings, stay grounded in Jesus' call to not *be* afraid. Do not act out of fear or act out of any one single emotion.

We'll need each other for this, for there will be days where you need to call someone and say, "I am on the edge between *feeling* fear and *being* afraid." Now this is where spiritual friendship comes in.

At Robertson-Wesley, we've been exploring this concept. Michael Foss had a book that introduced us to it. It is the fact that while many of us know many people that we like and we have many people on the internet that we follow, we also need to have relationships that are spiritual and deep. These are the kinds of friendships that will invite us to consider our actions, that will invite us to ask, "What is it that you have been given from God, personally, uniquely?" These are the friends who don't try and fix it. They don't send you miracle cures. They don't tell you that it's all going to be normal again.

They will tell you to feel how you're feeling, to be responsible in your self care and your care for others. They also will ask you to stay in touch with your spiritual tradition. For those of us at Robertson Wesley that is a Christian tradition and it's a tradition that says: "This time needs scripture, relationship and a deep faith that we are not alone, a deep faith that in life, in illness, in death and in life beyond death we are not alone.

On one side of you, may there be the rod of the tradition of your spirituality. Create or keep up your daily practices of prayer, walk, read. On the other side of you, may there be the staff of the wisdom from God and the world. Humanity is confronting this new situation with great knowledge about how to keep us safe and how to create a vaccine. That creativity from God is with our scientific community and our caregiving community will come to all of us and guide us in this time. You do not need to be afraid.

God's rod and staff are guiding you, comforting you.

Thanks be to God, Amen.