

Cindy Janzen memorial service meditation
Psalm 23

“The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.” *Pause...*

On the day that we gather to remember and grieve and celebrate Cindy, it seems necessary to begin with telling the truth. And the truth is...or perhaps it's a confession...when it comes to the life and being of Cindy, *we do want*. Dave has surely wanted his dearly loved partner to be with him, fully with him, without such a dreadful disease. Ben, Steve, Tony, and Denise have surely wanted their mother...their ever-loving, nurturing, and tending mother...to be part of their lives. Cindy's sisters and cousins, her friends and colleagues, her community...we have wanted...we have wanted her to live among us, the compassionate, generous, goofy, un-pretentious, sensitive, relational Cindy.

So this opening line of Psalm 23...it's a bit hard to read. And hard to hear. We *did* want something else for Cindy. We *did* want something else for ourselves. We've been grieving these losses for a long time.

But. Even as Cindy's health and memory and personality were slipping away, Cindy did not. Right next to the loss and grief, was the memory and steadfastness of who Cindy was and is. Dave's love for her never diminished. Her family's love for her stayed steady and strong. You, her community, kept her alive with stories: stories of her courage when life presented some hard circumstances; stories of Cindy's antics and sense of humor; stories of her kindness and caring; stories of her music; of her love and compassion. How is it that you, Cindy's family and friends, loved her so fully and faithfully?

Surely Psalm 23 holds an answer.

There's another way to read the opening verse: “The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be diminished.” Or “decreased.” While one reading holds our grief and anger, another reading reflects Cindy's faith. And the faith of her family and community. When Creator God is our shepherd, when we know...know in our bodies and beings, in our actions and relationships, in our choices and

responses...when we know that God is our shepherd, then truly, we can not and will not be diminished. No matter what happens, we will know...*in* our bodies and bones...we will know that God loves us, loves us eternally. And that God is with us...every place, every time, all times. The Creator of the universe is with us...as a shepherd!

Cindy knew herself and her life in the hands of the Shepherd. She trusted God, she trusted her Shepherd with her life. Through the years, she didn't, for a minute, take for granted when she found herself in lush pastures. When life was sweet, Cindy lived with an understanding that it was Creator God who gifted her and those she loved, with green pastures and refreshing waters. The presence of her Shepherd and the sustenance of the sweet grasses and cool waters formed her. It created in her a trust with deep, deep roots.

These strong and sturdy roots held her when the green pastures turned to dark valleys and the water dried up. And this is one of Cindy's gifts to her family and her community: Her resolute trust. She trusted her Shepherd with her very life...her health and well-being, her choices...all of it. And that trust didn't end when the hard things happened. When the hardest things came.

In a world where headlines scream the latest destruction, the newest outrage, the intolerable violence and injustice, it can be hard to trust that God is our shepherd. In response, we often hear, "Where is God?" Or, "Why is God letting this happen?" And when we talk about God as a shepherd, we are, perhaps, justified in asking why the shepherd isn't doing his job. Why isn't the shepherd keeping us, the sheep, away from bad things and bad places?

In response, this ancient and enduring Psalm, gives us a subtle and very different understanding of Creator God as shepherd. The psalmist prays: "Even though I walk through the darkest valley..." The psalmist understood that God the shepherd doesn't keep us from walking into dark valleys, doesn't keep dark valleys from opening up in front of us. Instead, God goes with us. When we walk, God walks. If we stop, God stops. If we fall...when we fall...God falls with us. And stays

there, until we can get up. And even there, at the bottom, we are not diminished because God, our Creator, is there, in the darkest valley, with us. God never promised that we won't know pain or grief; but God does promise that in those times and places, when they happen...and they will happen...God will be with us. Perhaps the only thing that makes the dark valleys bearable is God's presence, a presence that touches us, like a drop of cool water, just enough for the next moment, the next step. This Shepherd, this God of presence is the God we worship. The God Cindy trusted.

And because we cannot be diminished, we can come to the table and sit with our enemies, even when that enemy steals memories, steals the futures we had imagined with our loved ones, steals the lives of those we love. It is here, at this table, with this particular enemy, that Psalm 23 reflects Cindy's living and dying. It is here, at this table, where you, Cindy's beloved family and friends, have been sitting. At this table prepared by our ever-present-Shepherd, you have loved Cindy, letting the oil of God's love...gracious, gratuitous love...flow over Cindy, flow over you.

May the goodness and mercy of God, our Shepherd be with us;

May we trust the goodness and mercy of God, the one we trust all the days of our lives;

And may we live, at home in God's love and presence, our whole lives long.

May it be so.