

Re-membered in the Resurrection Garden
Psalm 23

Last Sunday, sitting with each other, outside with creation and the aliveness of the neighborhood, we found ourselves in the Resurrection Garden. The Garden that is any place and any time the Living Christ is in our midst. And we heard the invitation to practice *being in* the Resurrection Garden.

This morning, the familiar and well-loved Psalm 23 gives us another entry into the Resurrection Garden. When we, as individuals or as a community, forget that we are resurrection people, this Psalm will remind us to return to Paradise, to step back into God's Garden of eternal aliveness...the place Creator God invites us into...persistently inviting...reminding... "You're with me now. And I'm handling it."¹

Let's turn to this Psalm....

YHWH is my shepherd, I cannot be diminished. Or, Creator is my shepherd, I cannot be undone. The living, loving, eternally alive God of abundant and gratuitous grace and mercy and forgiveness is our shepherd. And because we are in the care of *this* Shepherd, there is nothing, no one, no circumstances that can threaten us. Nothing that can change our value of being precious. Nothing that can take away our identity as beloved of God. Within the love and care of *this* Shepherd, even if we fail, we will never be failures. Even if we lose, we will never be lost. Even when we break...we will never be outside the merciful and tender embrace of God. The love and presence of the Resurrected One will always...always be for us, with us.

YHWH is my shepherd, I cannot be diminished.

¹ Christena Cleveland, translating "Today you'll be with me in paradise" in her "Christ our Black Mother Speaks" essays.

Of course, there are times when we *feel* diminished. Times when we *feel* threatened, insecure, afraid, unloved. Times when we *feel* like we're on our own, that it's up to us to make something of ourselves and our lives. There are times we feel like it's all so hard and just not going the way we think it should go. These feelings are ever so real and very much a part of being human. And, when we feel them, we have the opportunity to notice that we've wandered outside of the Resurrection Garden. When we find ourselves chronically unhappy and complaining about our lives or about other people, it's a signal that we've wandered away from shepherding presence and care of the Resurrecting God. Out of habit or instinct, it's easy for me to let my complaints and criticisms be my shepherd and I try to handle life on my own. But even in those times, the Resurrected One stays with us until we remember and give ourselves once again to the Living Christ to shepherd our lives.

YHWH is my shepherd.

There are also times when we think *we* are the shepherd. That in life it's up to us to guide and tend others. When we forget that Creator God is our shepherd, we begin to take on this role ourselves, thinking we know how to direct others to the places they should go. When we forget that God is our shepherd, and start acting like *we* are the shepherd, we use our rods and staffs on each other. And when we do that, it's just a mess. It doesn't matter what our intentions are, we end up hurting each other. And when we find ourselves hurting...and hurting others...that is our cue to return to the Resurrection Garden. To remember that *YHWH* is our shepherd. The Living God, the Resurrected Christ, the Holy Spirit is our shepherd. The rod and staff of the Resurrecting Shepherd are love and justice, mercy and grace, creativity and aliveness. And when we listen together for the voice of the Resurrected One saying, "You're with me know. And I'm handling it," we'll know and experience the resurrecting and re-membling power of the Living God.

Being in the Resurrection Garden isn't just grazing in lush grasses or reclining at the beach all day every day. There *will be* times and places of deep darkness. There *will be* times when we're afraid, when we're hurting and breaking, grieving and dying. But even in those times...*especially* in those times...our Shepherd is present, whispering, "You're with me now. And I'm handling it."

In the Resurrection Garden, we'll still have conflicts. We'll still have enemies. But the difference is that in the Resurrection Garden there is the possibility of conflicts being resolved with justice followed by reconciliation. There is the possibility of enemies becoming friends. Outside of the Garden, when I face my enemy, I'm sure to hide behind defensive walls, sending out missiles of accusation and judgement. But in the Resurrection Garden, the living God prepares a Table and invites enemies to come and sit down across from each other. The Resurrected One, as we saw last Sunday, teaches us the power of vulnerability. We learn vulnerability by opening our hands to each other, showing and sharing our wounds. We can be vulnerable in the Resurrection Garden because the Living God is present, tending and shepherding us.

At the LORD'S table, enemies don't just sit at the same table, the Resurrecting Shepherd places me across the table from my enemy...we are face to face with. In the Resurrection Garden, the Shepherd's Table is a place where we can look into the eyes of the other. We look into each other's faces as mirrors of our own. And when I see myself in the face of my enemy...*when I am willing to see myself in the face of my enemy*...and when I am willing to be seen by my enemy...then...then resurrecting power begins to touch and heal what has been broken. First of all in me. And then in the relationship.

Psalm 23 is such an amazing entry into the Resurrection Garden. And offers so many places for us to explore together. But for today, I'll name only two more.

Given our conversations about unhealthy patriarchy, Psalm 23 gives us insight and imagination to see healthy ways of being women and men, of being masculine and feminine, of being human. In *The Will to Change*, the book a number of us are reading, bell hooks encourages us to explore Psalm 23 as a way out of white supremacist patriarchy. The vulnerable shepherding of the living Christ *will* guide us out of oppressive structures and systems into the Resurrection Garden.

And as we get closer to our congregation's sabbatical, Psalm 23 offers us practical ways to enter into this time of renewal. During the past year, as a community we've been working hard. Having hard conversations. Having necessary and good conflicts. Psalm 23 invites us...compels us to *let ourselves be tended* by our shepherding God.

- To be shepherded by God is to let ourselves be laid down in lush pastures.
- To be shepherded by our loving, resurrecting God is to let ourselves be guided to waters that will refresh us, rest us, restore and renew us.
- To be shepherded is to let God return us to ourselves...letting the living Christ re-member us...re-member us as individual bodies and beings...re-member us as a collective body and being.
- To be shepherded by Creator God is to be still long enough to feel and smell God's fragrant oil of anointing to fall from our heads, covering our faces, our hearts, soaking into our skin and bones, down to our toes.
- To be shepherded by the One who shows us the power of vulnerability is to be so cared for and so tended that we are free to experience the fullness of life. So that our cups overflow. Because when we are being shepherded by the Living God, we *will know and experience* the goodness and steadfast love of God in the dailiness of our lives.

May it be so.