



March 19, 2020

Dear Friends,

My prayers are with you today. When your image pops up in my mind's eye, I see your face, and give thanks for you. The connection we have through our faith is strong, and capable of holding us together even when we are not able to be physically in the same place. As I breathe deeply, I feel the Holy Spirit fill me up and calm me down. (Lots of deep breaths, these days!) Maybe this helps you as well?

During this time of uncertainty and needing to avoid spreading the Coronavirus, it is even more important for us to reach out to one another in all of the ways that we can. It would be wonderful if each of us could make the commitment to contact one or two other folks each day. We could check in to see how they are doing, share an uplifting story or prayer or thought. I am certain that both of us will feel better for the connection.

I am especially concerned about those who do not have access to the internet, and so miss out on group emails, on Facebook and text messages. As I work from home, my intention is to reach out each day to check in with folks and to offer support. I hope to send out frequent emails to our contact list, and weekly letters to those who do not have email. (If there is anyone we need to add to the physical letter list, please let me know.)

With so many aspects of church life shut down at this time, we still have to keep up with our bills, so your continued contributions are of vital importance to us. We know many people are having to tighten their own belts, and pray that this time of uncertainty will soon pass. If you are able to give, checks may be sent to the church address or you can donate by credit card by calling Lori (802-772-7143 is her home number), or by using the "DONATE" button on Facebook. You can also email rutlandumc@aol.com and ask Lori to give you a call to get your information.

Finally, I am hosting a Sunday morning gathering on Facebook this week at our usual worship time of 9:30am. To join in, go to the Rutland United Methodist Church Facebook page. I hope to see you then. If you are not able, we have included an outline of that experience for you to use whenever you are able.

Feel free to share your thoughts with me, your reflections on our worship as well as any concerns you might have at this time. If you have some inspiration to share, by all means send it to us! Along with most of our church staff, I am primarily working from home and am available by email or cell phone or even snail mail to the church address.

With Love, Prayers and Deep Gratitude,
Pastor Shirley

Pastor.rutland2019@gmail.com
802-779-7146
Rutland UMC
60 Strongs Avenue
Rutland, VT 05701

A Time Apart Worship
Rutland & Church of the Wildwood
Sunday, March 22, 2020

This morning's worship is different. We are each joining our hearts together from our homes, and yet we are together in Christ. We are united in love as the Body of Christ. May God's presence hold us close. May our love for one another move out beyond the walls of our homes into this community, this nation and this world. May our time of worship be an offering to God. So be it, Amen.

Opening Prayer

Loving God, I am here, we are *all* here, gathered in your Spirit. We come with open hearts and open hands. Thank you for being with us this day. Thank you for this time that we dedicate to celebrating your presence in our lives. Needing to be separate today, we long for the companionship that we share with others on this Christian journey. May we commune with one another in the Spirit today. In the midst of uncertainty, we come to you, oh God, seeking comfort. In receiving this comfort from you, may we offer comfort to others. We pray in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Centering Song – Come and Find the Quiet Center by Shirley Erena Murray

<https://youtu.be/YQiv6eB09xw>

Come and find the quiet center
in the crowded life we lead,
find the room for hope to enter,
find the frame where we are freed:
clear the chaos and the clutter,
clear our eyes, that we can see
all the things that really matter,
be at peace, and simply be.

Silence is a friend who claims us,
cools the heat and slows the pace,
God it is who speaks and names us,
knows our being, touches base,
making space within our thinking,
lifting shades to show the sun,

raising courage when we're shrinking,
finding scope for faith begun.

In the Spirit let us travel,
open to each other's pain,
let our loves and fears unravel,
celebrate the space we gain:
there's a place for deepest dreaming,
there's a time for heart to care,
in the Spirit's lively scheming
there is always room to spare!

Words © 1992, 2005 Hope Publishing Company,
380 S Main Pl, Carol Stream, IL 60188

Scripture – Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Contemplation of the Word

- Read over the 23rd Psalm, or recite it from memory.

- Read it again, very slowly, stopping to reflect on each scene.

- Try to picture yourself in the psalm and imagine the Lord being with you in each of the ways the psalmist speaks about. Be as specific as you can, and take as much time as you can to really bring each image to life.

- Ask yourself how it feels to be with the Lord as your shepherd in each of these scenes. *For example, how does it feel when the Lord brings you to a place where you can lie down and rest? Can you feel yourself really resting there? Let the peace of this experience sink in.*

Then, how does it feel to follow the Lord beside the still waters? Do you feel a sense of calmness? What do you see – can you maybe see yourself reflected in the waters?

What does it feel like to have your soul restored? Has anything ever happened in your life that made you feel that your soul had been re-energized in some way?

Take time to reflect on each part, each scene, and see what it might have to tell you.

- When you have made your way through the whole Psalm, just sit quietly for a few moments and let the experience be with you as long as it feels healing and right.

Reflection

When you are ready, you may want to write down your thoughts and reflections.

Closing Prayer

Lord, you are my shepherd. You guide me to all of the places I need to go. You bring me to places of refreshment and rest. You ease my mind when I am anxious. You calm my spirit when I get all stirred up. You comfort me simply by being here. Thank you for being here with me today. Thank you for being with my loved ones and with all of the people I hold in my heart. *(Take time to lift up people and situations about which you are concerned.)* I feel your healing presence, God, and I see you holding all of these loved ones in your arms, bringing them peace and comfort and healing. Be with this world in which we live. Be with those suffering from sickness and those who feel isolated and alone. Show me how to be your hands, your voice and your heart in this time and place. We pray in the name of Jesus who taught us how to pray using these words; *Our Father, who art in heaven...*

Closing Song – *He Leadeth Me* by William B. Bradbury & Cynthia Dobrinski

<https://youtu.be/y9BX7MSUplo>

1. He leadeth me: O blessed thought!
O words with heavenly comfort fraught!
Whate'er I do, where'er I be,
Still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me.
He leadeth me, he leadeth me,
By his own hand he leadeth me;
His faithful follower I would be,
For by his hand he leadeth me.

2. Sometimes mid scenes of deepest gloom,
Sometimes where Eden's bowers bloom,
By waters still, o'er troubled sea,
Still 'tis his hand that leadeth me.

(Refrain)

3. Lord, I would place thine hand in mine,
Nor ever murmur nor repine;
Content, whatever lot I see,
Since 'tis thine hand that leadeth me.
(Refrain)

4. And when my task on earth is done,
When by thy grace the victory's won,
E'en death's cold wave I will not flee,
Since God through Jordan leadeth me.

Benediction

May God guide you this day, wherever you go. May God's hand hold you upright, helping you be strong and resilient in any winds that blow. May God's warm words offer you comfort and courage. May God give peace to your heart, calming your fears and easing your mind. May you be healthy and whole. Go in peace and may the peace of Christ be with you today and always.

Reaching Out

I encourage you to speak with someone else about your experiences with Psalm 23 today. You might think of a friend, possibly someone from the church, with whom you could share this experience, and give them a call. Reach out to someone in some way, to share. These connections are important and powerful.

Spiritual Support Resources

***Pandemic* by Lynn Unger**

What if you thought of it
as the Jews consider the Sabbath—
the most sacred of times?

Cease from travel.

Cease from buying and selling.

Give up, just for now,
on trying to make the world
different than it is.

Sing. Pray. Touch only those
to whom you commit your life.

Center down.

And when your body has become still,
reach out with your heart.

Know that we are connected
in ways that are terrifying and beautiful.

(You could hardly deny it now.)

Know that our lives
are in one another's hands.

(Surely, that has come clear.)

Do not reach out your hands.

Reach out your heart.

Reach out your words.

Reach out all the tendrils
of compassion that move, invisibly,
where we cannot touch.

Promise this world your love—
for better or for worse,
in sickness and in health,
so long as we all shall live.

A Prayer from Chatauqua

Be with us, Divine One, in this time of anxiety,
Comfort those who are infected, soothe all of us who are affected,

Strengthen and protect the medical caregivers,

Embolden our leaders with strength and wisdom,

Give us holy permission to do what is best in each moment,
even if that's "hunker down."

And renew our hope for a world with less anxiety and more joy, with less "me first"
and more "no, please, after you!", with less fear and more love.

Faith & Fear

There is a lot of fear "out there" as well as within our hearts and minds. It is challenging to remain steady and centered as we also seek to stay aware of the most recent news and health guidelines.

Some people would say that if you have faith you won't have fear, but I would argue that faith is meant to help us through the challenges of life - including fear. Faith helps us, not to turn a blind eye to what is happening in the world, but to see with clarity and compassion - seeing as Christ sees.

This week I watched this brief video in which several pastors talk about faith and fear. I found it helpful and encouraging and thought you might appreciate it as well. Here is the link if you have access to the internet - <https://youtu.be/f5YwzEJwbQw>