**Reflection - The Rev. Herbert Jones**
Sometimes the lectionary gives us little gifts. The three year cycle that was established years ago has no connection with current events. Those who chose the order of scripture readings had no idea what the world would be facing on any given Sunday in the future; how could they? But today, when we are in the midst of uncertainty, we are given the gift of the 23rd Psalm.

The 23rd Psalm is the second most memorized piece of scripture in the Christian Church; the first being the Lord’s Prayer. The version we all grew up with is from the King James Version of the Bible of course, and it is beautifully written, and the version we read today is also beautiful and comforting. The first image that comes to mind when we think of the 23rd Psalm is that of comfort and peace. God restores my soul, God comforts me, my cup is full, I live in a condition of abundance because of God. These are appropriate images to have of this Psalm, and it is indeed very comforting for us.

But there is more in the psalm that we must consider. We needn’t ignore those things in the psalm that remind us of what it is that we need comfort and protection from. We walk through the valley of the shadow of death; our table is surrounded by our enemies. We fear no evil, but evil is present nonetheless. The 23rd Psalm comforts us by reminding us that we have a shepherd, but it also reminds us why we need one. We live in a hard world where death and sickness is ever present.  This is made even more clear and present to us in the times in which we are living. If we give into fear, if we lose our hope, if we stop trusting in the protection of our shepherd, we become panicky and nervous, like sheep.

But as the psalm tells us, we do indeed have a shepherd; The Lord is our shepherd.

We have a shepherd in Jesus Christ who knows us, who knows our weaknesses and our foibles and our yearnings. He knows us to a depth that runs deeper than any pain or shame or sorrow or fear or fatigue can run. If we can come to trust this on a level as deep as his love and knowledge of us, then we can become truly free.

We live in a society that tells us that we are supposed to be strong and independent and that we shouldn’t be looking elsewhere to have our own needs met; We need to be self-sufficient.

But if I’ve learned anything in my life it is that I can’t do this, I cannot live my life without God. And I can’t live my life without the community that we have built around God. Today this community looks like Zoom conferences and YouTube videos and good old fashioned phone trees. We at the church are doing everything we know how, and some things we don’t know how, to stay in community during these times. Help us, let us know what you need. Join us when you can. We are here.

What I am able to find in the 23rd psalm, is comfort in an oftentimes painful and difficult world. And I find an admonition to put my faith in Jesus the good shepherd.  Not to satisfy my every desire, but to know that it is God and the community of God that I can truly rely on, and that to put my trust in lesser things will inevitably lead to disappointment and resentment and fear.

This is not what God created us for, and this is not what God became incarnate for, it is not what Jesus laid down his life for nor is it what he defeated death to show us.  God wants us to live and learn and to be free and love each other and to love God. But in order to do this, in order to gain this freedom, we must be able to rely on each other and on our shepherd, our savior, our God.

Amen.