

The 23rd Psalm is probably a part of the bible that many many people over the age of 45 have memorized over the course of a lifetime. Show of hands from the over 50 set.... How many of you memorized it?

Now for those of you who are under 50—do you know this psalm by heart?

I'll be honest- I probably would not have this memorized if I hadn't learned it in a piece of music. I find that what I've sung will always be with me.

For those of you who do NOT know, my dad was a composer—studied with Randall Thompson—and was the choir director at St Paul's in Brunswick for 40 years. When my sister Laurie and I were—oh—probably 8 and 9, my father wrote us a simple duet with words from the 23rd Psalm. We loved it and sang it many times. By the time we recorded it much later-- we had memorized it.

As I have been getting ready to go on sabbatical, I've been drawn to the 23rd Psalm—

The LORD is my shepherd/I shall not be in want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures/ and leads me beside still waters/ he restores my soul

I have been struck by that image. For the last two years or so, I find I really yearn to be led beside “still waters.”

There's are so many things bombarding us, aren't there?

Lately, I've been bombarded with perfectly justifiable requests for descriptions of what I do—opening the church, closing the church, opening the gate for funerals, questions about supply, questions about what to do if this or that happens...People need to know, and I need to facilitate that.

Add to that what is happening in our lives: bombarded by the messages on TV, radio and phones about the things we don't do well, the things we need, the things we could do better if we had this, or that, or the other thing!

We've learned to dread the news about the world crises, the news about the perpetual gun violence here in the US, the hate-filled laws going through in every state to punish those least capable of fighting back.

We can hardly keep up, keep going, and keep centered.

It's like a glass of clear water, when someone puts a fistful of dirt in it and stirs it up.

It's murky. Clouded. This is our mind on stress.

Then I read again the 23rd Psalm:

He makes me lie down in green pastures/ (makes me lie down, not sit!) and leads me beside still waters/ he restores my soul

Still waters. I need this for my soul to be restored. My family needs this. The world needs this.

One thing is certain: the world won't ever stop.

We can't still the world. We can't still the water. What can we still?

We can still ourselves.

Part of what I will be doing while on Sabbatical centers around taking the time to allow myself to be still.

I urge you to do the same.

Take time this summer to look for ways to be in green pastures, beside still waters. I'm not talking literally here—although the green of nature and the tranquility of water are never a bad thing to seek.

But what we need is more than just a nice outing. It's about finding the place in you that can be very still. So still, that we can hear the voice of God.

Jesus talks about how his followers know his voice, God's voice, and they come to that voice. Now—there are many competing voices in the world today. How do you find the voice of Jesus in the bedlam? By being still.

Richard Rohr says that “*the mystery of transformation more often happens not when something new begins, but when something old falls apart. The pain and chaos of something old falling apart invites the soul to listen at a deeper level, and sometimes force the soul to go to a new place. Most of us would never go to new places in any other way.*”

So when we need clarity, we need to be still.

Look at what's happened to the glass of muddy water. Because it's not being stirred by everything around it, it has a chance to settle, so that it can get clear.

Let's all lean in to this sabbatical time and set time aside to let our minds and hearts clear. Let us take the time to listen for the voice of the One we follow.

It's time to take time to restore our souls.

And if people, or the media or the world stir you up again—remember that it takes time to be still and let it settle.

The Lord is our shepherd. We shall not want. He makes us lie down in green pastures. He leads us beside still waters. He restores our souls. Amen.