

**"My cup overflows..."**  
**Psalm 23**

**CINDY:** I haven't been able to find any proof of this, but I suspect that after The Lord's Prayer, the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm is the most well known and well loved passage of scripture in Christendom. I tried to recall any funeral, memorial, or burial service that I've been honored to be a part of that did not include either a spoken or sung version of this Psalm, and I can't remember any that did not. It is common for pastors to read this Psalm on hospital or home visits with those who are sick. Thousands of books have been written on this Psalm alone, and in our hymnal there are 15 hymns based on Psalm 23, several of which we will sing this morning.

By this time in the season of Lent, I am ready for Psalm 23. We've been in a metaphoric wilderness for several weeks now. We've been invited to repent, to reflect, to wait, to step out of the darkness into light, and we'll likely visit these themes again before Easter morning. But **this** morning, we are invited to rest in the promise of God's care and protection, to be comforted, to accept the cup that overflows with blessing.

*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.*

*The Lord makes me lie down in green pastures;  
and leads me beside the still waters.*

*God restores my soul.*

*and leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*

**DOUG WEST'S REFLECTIONS ON THESE VERSES:**

My life and experience suggest;

When disaster strikes and darkness fills your life, thank God.

When your parents disappoint , thank God.

When your legs fail you, thank God.

When teachers mistreat you, thank God.

When your world view is shaken by your experience, thank God.

When you go through lovers like shoes, thank God.

When you live with a maniac, thank God.

When your wife gets hit by a truck, thank God.

When sleeplessness costs you your job, thank God.

When your confidence is gone, thank God.

God is not the author of your difficulties, 'tis the devil, 'tis evil.

But thank God for God is with you.

Thanking God is my first step in getting through the day.

By saying thanks I lessen the power that troubles have over me.

I am then more able to make the limited choices I have without  
lamenting how limited my choices are.

I can then see the world more clearly without doubt and disappointment  
clouding the view.

My tendency to panic is lessened by thanking God.

By thanking God I am to put my focus on the world around me instead of on me.

I am better able to reflect on what actions I need to recommend to others.

When I do focus on myself, I am able to take myself less seriously.

I can not put my relationship to God into a rational construct;  
my attempts do so leave me full of doubt.

So I say "please" and "thank you" and pray that God will continue to support me.

Since I understand neither my life, nor the world around me,

And because I wish be the best person I can be,

I thank God for what power and understanding I do have;

wrapping God's love around me I go out into the world.

*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil;  
For you are with me; your rod and staff – they comfort me.*

## **JILL SCHREIBER'S REFLECTIONS ON THIS VERSE**

"Do not be afraid," is a constant refrain in the Bible. I have been thinking about fear a lot recently. When I first heard about the NIU shooting and realized that the shooter was from my rather small school, I had a rather irrational response of fear. Part of this may be attributed to the fact that the last time I was in the Social Work school, 14 years ago, there was a murder. I was in class during that murder, and it was the closest I had come to such a terrifying event.

That murder heightened my response to the NIU shootings. I did not know the shooter but many of my friends and teachers did. I understood at some level that the probability of such an event occurring was remote. But at the emotional level I was really afraid. Perhaps you have had a time when something unexpected occurred, a robbery, an accident, 9/11... During the aftermath you function as if things are normal, but you certainly don't feel normal and you are not centered on God. You feel scared. Afraid. No wonder the Bible says "Do not be afraid" Yeah right, that is certainly easier said than done.

It was during this time that I emailed my spiritual director from Goshen. She emailed me back and included in her email was this quote, "Nothing is certain; everything is safe." "Nothing is certain; everything is safe."

Of course at an intellectual level it is blatantly false (as Dan immediately pointed out). Some things are certain and some things are not safe. However, at

the deeper spiritual level, it is profoundly true. When I can live in this deeper space, I can be present to the uncertainty and not overwhelmed by it. I am a better friend to the people who are grieving and fearful around me. I am not always there, but it is where I want to be.

*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.*

*You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.*

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my;*

*And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

## **JERI LAKE'S REFLECTIONS ON THESE VERSES**

Last week I had written something for Bible Study which referenced my new found love of clay. Cindy saw in it a reflection on this verse and asked if I would share it this morning. I went home read the Psalm and then read my words and, frankly, I didn't really see the connection. So, I put my notebook aside and just looked at the verse, the wording and the images... Why the table in the presence of my enemies? Was it about flaunting my protection and bounty? You know, "nanny nanny boo boo," you can't get me. I'll just eat my feast and make you wish you knew my Shepherd!" OK, probably not, it's probably about much more than that! Do I invite my enemies to the table since they are standing right there, does fear and hatred weaken or dissolve when we break bread with the "other"? A blessing is upon my head, my cup is overflowing, there is more than enough to share. I could give up my vain wants and give in to the Shepherd's staff prodding me to extend welcome at the table. Then surely goodness and mercy would... oh wait, that's not my verse, strike that. When I'm working through something I tend to scribble down my thoughts, read them over, cross stuff out, write in the margins, take a nap and repeat the process a few times. And a funny thing happened while I was doing that. I found the clay! I think I realized what Cindy had seen. Sometimes the enemy isn't the "other",

or something we can point to outside ourselves and say "Go away you enemy, leave me alone!" What if the enemy is within us, what if we are threatened by our own brokenness, our pain and losses, our fears, or our sense of life's unfairness. Say, just for example, one day a person looks at her hands and remembers how many times they touched a new life fresh from God and now that privilege has been taken away and she wants it back. The loss feels like an enemy and the person says "I'm going to fight this until I get back what I want!" And in the middle of the battle she finds this lump of clay in her hand... and a new blessing happens right there, in the presence of the enemy she can't defeat or even outrun! So Cindy, here is the Cracked Potter's paraphrase of Psalm 23:5:

You set a table for me with bright new dishes;  
While I stood there clinging to the broken ones.  
Your healing oil mends my "cracked vessel."  
And I'm overflowing with cups.  
Thanks be to God!

**CINDY:** One of the things I find most moving about Psalm 23 is that it follows directly after one of the great laments. In Psalm 22 are words that Jesus himself uttered at his crucifixion. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me? I cry by day, but you do not answer; I cry by night, but find no rest." What immediately follows this heart-felt angst are these words:

I shall not want;  
I will lie down in green pastures;  
God leads me; God restores me; God is with me;  
God comforts me, prepares a table for me, anoints me;  
My cup overflows;  
Goodness and mercy shall follow me;  
and I will dwell with God my whole life long"

Earlier in this service - during the Invitation to Worship and the time of Confession - we spoke together of moving from darkness into light. We churn and thrash in the profound darkness of Psalm 22 and then rest in the profound light and calm of Psalm 23.

The blind man in the Gospel text that Greg read for us **literally** moves from darkness into light as Jesus restores his sight. Jesus says in John 9: "I came into this world so that those who do not see may see." And then what happens immediately after this story of physical and spiritual illumination? Jesus proclaims himself as the Good Shepherd. In John 10 he says:

I am the good shepherd;

And I know my sheep.

I am the good shepherd;

And the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.

Jesus, the good Shepherd knows his sheep by name. Jesus, the good Shepherd is our provider, our burden gatherer, our guide, our restorer, our comforter, the preparer of our table, and our overflowing cup.

And here we are...back to the themes of Psalm 23...

Jeri Lake made this beautiful cup for her son-in-law. It is the second cup she made for him because he said the first one didn't hold enough. Our cups will never be large enough to contain God's gifts of care and comfort. They will perpetually overflow with God's goodness and grace all the days of our lives.