

Sunday March 22, 2020 – Easter Hill United Methodist Church

Provided for this week are two bible studies, one on Psalm 23 and one on 1 Samuel 16:1-13

Call to Worship – Read Romans 15:1-7 (with focus on 15:5-6)

Open with a word of prayer

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, (or if you have by yourself) have each participant finish the following sentences: “When I am around this person _____, I receive comfort.” “When I am at _____(location)_____, I receive comfort.”

Take a moment to give God thanks for the people and places that give you comfort.

Bible Study – Read Psalm 23

Psalm 23 – Context - This psalm is perhaps the best known in the Bible, especially as it expresses the assurance of God’s love and presence in the face of death. It also expresses the idea that God will provide everything we need for life: food (“green pastures”), water (“still waters”), safety (“right paths”). God is the one who keeps us alive (“restores my soul”).

Reflection questions – Choose two or three. Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

- Which of the following images from Psalm 23 are most comforting and why? (makes me lie down in green pastures; leads me beside still waters; restores my soul; leads me in right paths for his name’s sake?)
- As a group, work to come up with opposite images for verses 1-3 (for example: “I take paths of self-destruction, or I often lie down in self-pity”)
- How are the shepherd’s (God’s) rod and staff comforting? [The staff or crook would keep the sheep on the path; the rod was used to ward off scavengers.]
- How is eating at a table of abundance in the presence of enemies an image of security?
- In verse six, we read about God’s goodness and mercy following us. A more literal translation might note that we are being pursued by God’s goodness and mercy. How is it comforting that God will pursue us even when we have gone off the path or when we are in danger?
- Having explored the rest of the psalm, what do you think the opening line, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want” is referring to? [We learn to want the things the Shepherd would want for us – security, abundance, comfort in who God is guiding us to be.]
- Read or sing the spiritual below and then answer the following: Name a time when you felt God (or someone else) was helping you along your journey (or running the race with you). If appropriate, end your group’s time by singing the spiritual one last time.

Suggested Spiritual

Guide My Feet

*Guide my feet while I run this race; (yes, my Lord!)
guide my feet while I run this race; (yes, my Lord!)
guide my feet while I run this race,
for I don't want to run this race in vain! (race in vain!)*

*Hold my hand while I run this race; (yes, my Lord!)
hold my hand while I run this race; (yes, my Lord!)
hold my hand while I run this race,
for I don't want to run this race in vain! (race in vain!)*

*Stand by me while I run this race; (yes, my Lord!)
stand by me while I run this race; (yes, my Lord!)
stand by me while I run this race,
for I don't want to run this race in vain! (race in vain!)*

*I'm your child while I run this race; (yes, my Lord!)
I'm your child while I run this race; (yes, my Lord!)
I'm your child while I run this race,
for I don't want to run this race in vain! (race in vain!)*

*Search my heart while I run this race; (yes, my Lord!)
search my heart while I run this race; (yes, my Lord!)
search my heart while I run this race,
for I don't want to run this race in vain! (race in vain!)*

Read Psalm 23

Reflection. This psalm suggest that God is watching over us constantly throughout our lives, and that we belong to God as sheep to a shepherd. God is not only the shepherd, but also the host who invites us to fellowship in the “house of the Lord,” the community of the faithful. That community is the true sanctuary, where we can be “safe and secure from all alarms,” as the old hymn says. Do you feel that way in your church community?

Closing Prayer – End by praying the following together:

God of comfort, peace, and security: We know that trusting you for protection will not guard us from every danger. But we can rest assured that no power on heaven or earth can separate us from the presence of your love. Guide our feet, hold our hand, search our heart while we run this race, so that our running would glorify you. Amen.

Bible Study - Read 1 Samuel 16:1-13

1 Samuel 16:1-13. Context. Saul was the first of the kings of Israel. The prophet Samuel, something of a king maker, had anointed Saul at the demand of the people. But Saul's actions had displeased God and God rejected him. This week's reading tells the story of how David came to be anointed, even while Samuel seemed unable to see what God saw, and Samuel's man Saul was still a force to be reckoned with. The main point of the passage is that God does not see as we see: God sees the heart, not just outward appearance. And the one whom God chooses to rule the entire people of Israel is the eighth and last son of a man from an obscure family.

Read 1 Samuel 16:1-13 again

What touches your heart, what do you hear in the story, what questions do you have, or what doesn't make sense to you in the story?

Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

Read 1 Samuel 16:1-13 again

Here are some reflection questions. Choose one or two of them to discuss. Again, write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

- 1) How often do we judge or misjudge a person or situation because we look on the outward appearance only?
- 2) What change in us is needed to see the other's heart/soul with Christ's eyes?
- 3) What does it mean to be spiritually blind in our community?
- 4) What don't we see? What do we overlook? Why?

Closing Prayer – End by praying the following together:

Be thou our vision, O God! Give us new eyes to see, new ears to hear? May we look beyond the exterior of the other and into their hearts. May we see the goodness and love, the hurt and the pain. May we see their gifts and talents. May we learn to see as Christ sees. Amen! and Amen!