INVITATION
Thank you for joining us on-line or by phone! As we gather, you may discover that your devices have been automatically muted. This service will be interactive but only by using the “chat” feature. If you connect by phone, you are invited to mute your device so others don’t hear your background noise. Also, you are invited to create sacred space where you are: to light a candle, to breath deeply, to hold a leaf or flower, to gaze out a window or at a picture that centers you. Let us be present to the Spirit that brings us together and loves us where we are!

GATHERING MUSIC

WELCOME
“Beloved ones, we are so glad you have joined as one in the Spirit for worship this morning. Whether you’re in your living room or bedroom or outdoors, you are welcome here. Whether you’re wearing your pajamas or street clothes or hiking boots, you are welcome here. Whether you’re drinking tea or coffee or water, you are welcome here. Whether this is your first-time on-line for worship or you’ve tried it hundreds of times before, you are welcome here. Whether you’re alone in your home or with family members, you are welcome here. Whether you’re feeling calm or anxious or somewhere in between, you are welcome here. Whether you’ve worshipped with us many times or this is your first time, you are welcome here.

We are so glad you are present and have joined us for worship this morning.

CALL TO WORSHIP (Psalm 113 as written by Christine Robinson, http://doubterpsalms.blogspot.com/2006/04/psalm-113.html)

Hallelujah!
Open your hearts, you servants of God
Open your hearts to God
Strive to be a fertile field for God’s love
All day, all night, all ways.
God’s work encompasses the nations,
the world, the distances between the stars.
God’s work is in the atom, the
core, the intestacies of matter.
God’s work is in the deeds of love, the
justice of society, the care of friends.
God’s life is in every life, making us one family.
God’s justice lifts the poor
setting them with nobility in the human community.
God’s love fills our hearts
with everything we need.
THE LORD’S PRAYER  *(Second Church follows the version of the Lord’s Prayer that is offered below. However, you are invited to say this prayer aloud in the tradition that brings you the most comfort: debt/debtors; sins/sin; trespasses/trespass).*

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

THE SCRIPTURE LESSON  *(This reading is from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. You may follow along in your own Bible or at www.biblegateway.com. At this website you can even explore other versions of the Psalm. Do as the Spirit leads you!)*

**PSALM 23: The Divine Shepherd; A Psalm of David**

1 The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.
2 He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;[a]
3 he restores my soul.  [b]
He leads me in right paths[c] for his name’s sake.

4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley, [d]
   I fear no evil; for you are with me;
   your rod and your staff—
   they comfort me.

5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
6 Surely[g] goodness and mercy[h] shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the L ORD my whole life long.[i]

MEDITATION  *“Thou Art with Me”*[1]

Let us Pray: Loving Spirit, grant us presence, pure hearts and loving purpose in all we say and hear, knowing You are with us and that You speak to us in so many ways. Amen.

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When I was eight my mom, dad, youngest sister and I moved from Albuquerque, NM back to Connecticut where my parents had originally grew up, met and married. They wanted

to be closer to family, primarily because my dad was struggling with serious health issues. It took a while for my parents to find work and then a home for the four of us to live in.

So for the first 6 months in New England we lived with my grandparents, my dad’s parents. It was a cozy arrangement, as the six of us made do in their small, bright red shingled two-bedroom salt-box cape in Ansonia, CT. In addition to becoming newly acquainted with snow and all the outdoor gear that came with it, it was a lot, adapting to a new school, making new friends and meeting dozens of relatives I had never met before. My grandparents also insisted that every Sunday we had to go to church and the first thing that my grandmother expected my little sister and I to learn was the 23rd Psalm. Forget the new and popular “Good News” Bible translation that was in the church pews and Sunday School classes, or the New Revised Standard Version that we just heard this morning. Oh no! Sioux and I had to commit to memory the King James Version of Psalm 23:

23 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.
3 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.
4 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.
5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

It was painful then – to go from no practiced faith tradition at home, to attending worship and Sunday School every Sunday and then to have regular Bible memory lessons at Grandma’s dining room table – over tea and cookies, to make it all a little better of course. She did think of everything.

Over the years however, I’m thankful for her insistence, guidance and the model of her faith. When times are trying, as they are now, I have comforting words to turn to and to say aloud or to myself. And I can share them with others. I’ve prayed the 23rd psalm at the bedsides of ill friends, at the funerals of many church members, while waiting to go in for
surgery or during a root canal procedure. It’s what I recite when I’m taking off on a plane and the first thing that came to my mind when the terrors of 9/11 and Sandy Hook unfolded. For the last 4 weeks I’ve been suffering through an insomnia cycle. The only thing that helps to restore a sense of rest in the middle of the night is my recitation of Psalm 23 over and over, just the way Grandma would have liked to have heard it. The words settle me and often ease me into a short but most needed nap.

No matter who I’m with, where I’m at, what I’m struggling with, Psalm 23 steadies me, calms me, re-centers my confidence. I’m encouraged to breathe through my biggest fears, my daily worries, the worst news, the newest obstacle.

And in my ministry and pastoral care of others, I often hear the same.

These words of comfort are something to hang on to when we are facing grief, loss, anxiety and the unknowns of our day to day living. These verses transform us from anxiety and fear to trust and hope.

It’s interesting to take a moment to consider this shepherd Psalm a little deeper because it involves a transformed vision of reality. As comforting as this Psalm is, its set in the context of threat and anxiety. We find comfort in these familiar words, forgetting to notice that the Psalmist is traveling through the darkest valley and is feasting with enemies all around. What we do know intuitively through our mutual humanity is that circumstances can be challenging and down right dark, yet we can still experience God’s peace and know that it is well with our souls.

Rev. Bruce Epperly, a colleague and on-line mentor of mine, points out that Psalm 23 is a Hebraic version of the Celtic caim or encircling practice in which one draws a circle around oneself, pivots in a clockwise direction, and invokes a prayer of protection. Many of life’s challenges will not go away, but we can experience God’s presence and a peace that surpasses all understanding in the midst of turmoil and threat.²

The words of the Psalmist speak to our current concerns over the coronavirus. God is with us, companioning us, in times of fear and anxiety. Jesus, who also knew this Psalm, no doubt leaned on God’s presence in the very same ways: praying what was familiar and seeking God’s peace.

As we are choosing rightly to practice social distancing, sequestering ourselves at home and not knowing how long this global situation will last, it’s easy to feel discouraged and depressed at our inability to continue our routines, to see our family members and co-workers, to go to the gym or the store, go to church, volunteer or to reach out to others. Yet, we can pray!

Prayer connects us with God and with others. Prayer joins us with all creation. When we pray, we are never alone – we have God, each other, and our relationships with friends and strangers. Prayer liberates us from isolation spiritually even when we must isolate physically!

In these days of Coronavirus, I invite you to reach out in prayer. Return to Psalm 23 or other verses that bring you comfort. And pray for others. I invite you to go through your church directory, your address book, your work roster or your email groups. Pray for loved ones, friends, persons in need, and our nation’s leaders. Each morning this week, I’ve walked our long driveway, reciting Psalm 23 and then I pray. It’s healing. It’s comforting. It’s doing something in this time of helplessness. And as I pray I know, thou art with me. God is present. And each of you are close in heart. May it be so for you. Amen.

My Shepherd, You Supply My Need

Resignation: CMD

1. My Shepherd, you supply my need; most holy is your name.
2. When I walk through the shades of death, your presence is my stay.
3. Your sure provisions, gracious God, attend me all my days.

in one word of your support breathing, drives all my fears away.

You bring my wandering spirit back when I forsake your ways;
Your hand, in sight of all my foes, does still my table spread;
There would I find a settled rest, while others go and come;

you lead me, for your mercy's sake, in paths of truth and grace.
my cup with blessings overflows, your oil anoints my head.
no more a stranger or a guest, but like a child at home.
SILENT PRAYER

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

O God,
The rock on which we stand
In the midst of troubled waters.

We confess that our power is not sufficient for this moment,
That our talents, our treasure, even our love
Cannot match the need and suffering that is before us.

And so we gather, to boldly ask you for your gifts,
For the gift of compassion, for those who are hurting and afraid
For the gift of anger for those who have no choice but to work or to parent or to suffer
For the gift of calm, unbreakable steadfastness when we are told that there is simply not enough, even of hope

We come to ask you for your hidden gifts:
For the whispers of Sabbath,
Of hope blooming in the cracks,
Of slow joy growing in the unkempt places of our lives,

And so, before we return to our world
With its ever-steady drumbeat of fear
And frantic not-knowing

Give us, in this moment, one sacred pause
One breath
One sound of sheerest silence

So that we may turn our spirits to you
The bearer of our burdens
And return refreshed.
Amen.

BENEDICTION

Go forth, bearing the Good News that God promises a future full of hope.
Go forth, trusting that you are anointed and your cup runs over.
Go forth, knowing the Spirit lives with you in the home of your heart.
Go in boldness, proclaiming God’s love of the world. Amen.

ANNOUNCEMENTS
AN EXTRA PRAYER POEM TO SHARE

Rev. Steve Garnaas-Holmes

Even though I walk through the valley
of the shadow of death,
I fear no evil; for you are with me;
your rod and your staff— they comfort me.
—Psalm 23.4

In this time of fear and uncertainty
we look with anxiety to the future.
But the Good Shepherd leads you
into the present moment.

Anxiety is an invader from the future.
The Shepherd of our Souls offers us
courage and comfort in this moment.
Follow the path into the present.

The green pastures may be distant
from this shadowed valley,
but they are greater than you know.
You fear the smallness of your vision.

Meanwhile the Shepherd of our Souls is here
with us, leading us, right now.
Behold this moment. Behold the love.
Look till you see beauty. Stay till you know.

It is not protection from the future,
but the presence of the Shepherd,
even in the darkest day, that is our peace.
Trust that peace. Follow that shepherd

into this moment. Be present.
Stop and breathe, and breathe again.
No matter what happens in the future
God is here, with you, now. Be present.