

First Fifteen: November 1-5
Scripture for Sunday November 7 – Isaiah 25:6-9

Monday: Psalm 23

Going Deeper: The words of 23rd Psalm are some of, if not the most recognizable words in the Bible. Sadly, they are also often associated primarily with times of sadness and loss. We hear these words typically read during funerals or memorial services, and yet as you read them listen to what the Psalmist is saying. They are not talking about death and dying, instead I hear words of life, life lived well even in the midst of hardship and opposition. Verse 3 is typically translated... *“he (or God) restores my soul. Guiding me in the path of righteousness for God’s name’s sake.”* In the Common English Bible, we read... *“he keeps me alive. Guiding me in proper paths for the sake of his good name.”* I must admit I like the way this verse is rendered in The Message... *“True to your word, you let me catch my breath and send me in the right direction.”* Next Sunday, All Saints Sunday, we will remember those who have died in the past year during our services. We feel the loss of those we love, and yet we know death is not the end, merely a threshold. As this week begins let us remember what is most important right now... to live well and to live knowing we are loved by God who is our ever-present shepherd.

Prayer: Lord, you are my shepherd. Thank you for your guidance, your comfort and your grace that lifts me to my feet when I fall, dries my tears when I am sad, and calms my heart when I am afraid. Help me this day and throughout this week to remember and give thanks for the lives of others who have touched and inspired mine. And Lord as my shepherd lead and guide me so my life will do the same for others. Amen.

Tuesday: 1 John 3:1-3

Going Deeper: In April of 2020 my mother slipped into the hands of God. In the months preceding her death, she often pondered what heaven looked like and what happened when we die. She looked to me to provide her with some answers. I remember reading these verses to her, telling her we don’t know for sure, but what we do know for certain is God’s love for us. In these words from Jesus’ disciple John, I hear him sharing with us hope that carries us beyond any fear of death, and this hope is grounded in Jesus’ resurrection. I think that is the underlying meaning of his words in verse 2... *“what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know... we shall be like him...”* I hear a message of confident hope from someone who knew and experienced the Risen Christ. I hear a message that carries us beyond the unknown, and possibly our fear of this unknowing, leading us to the solid ground of faith in God’s love which is the foundational source of all life and resurrection. I encourage you read over these three verses several times. What speaks to your heart? What message of hope do you hear? And how can you act upon it today?

Prayer: Life giving and creative God, I ask for your peace this day, peace that is beyond my understanding. I pray for hope that bubbles up from within me so that I can and will choose to live fully and boldly, not held captive to any concerns or fears over things I can not control. I ask

for confidence, for myself, and also confident hope is your abiding love and presence with me. Knowing you are working within me even when I do not realize it and using me to help others in what I do and how I do it. Thank you, my Lord. Amen.

Wednesday: Philippians 2:1-11

Going Deeper: These words recorded by Paul in his letter to the gathering of believers in Philippi are most likely one of the first creeds or hymns of the early church. They reveal to us one of the primary qualities of Jesus' character that we are called to emulate... humility. Humility is not a sign of weakness, or a lack of self-confidence. I believe humility flows from a deep understanding of who we are, and who we are not. Humility has more to do with strength and courage than fear. Humility invites us to live from an attitude of surrender, knowing we do not need attachments to things, or even other people, because we have found our true source of life and meaning. When we are able to accept humility's invitation, we are free to let go, in many respects our acceptance of this invitation is part of the rhythm of our faith... we live, we die, and we experience resurrection. I encourage you to read these verses several times throughout your day and linger with the words or phrases that catch your attention or pull at your heart. Stay with them and invite the Holy Spirit to help you uncover what it is about them you need to hear.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, come near to me and help me trust that you have given me the path to find all I need to live well and live fully. Although I know this rhythm of my faith, knowing it and actually embracing it are not always the same. Help me to see and embrace your flow of life, death, and resurrection in my life and in the events and people around me. I pray for your peace and guidance as I learn let go and listen for the invitation of humility today. Amen.

Thursday: John 11:20-26

Going Deeper: Every time I read this story in Jesus' ministry, I find myself caught up in his words found in verse 25... *"I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."* There is one word I hope you hear in this phrase... *"whoever **lives** and believes in me will never die."* More often than not I have heard the word believes and missed Jesus' complete teaching. Yes we are to believe, but our belief must also shape our living! This exchange between Martha and Jesus is part of the larger story of the raising of Lazarus, but Jesus' teaching here is critical to the whole point of what is about to happen. The resurrection of the dead is not an everyday reality, but the resurrection of our awareness that we are called to live from a faith grounded in resurrection hope is something we must embrace every day! Where do you need to embrace your belief in Jesus and his message of resurrection hope so that it is more active in shaping how you live? If you have a copy of The Message, I encourage you to look at these verses in that translation. I find them truly helpful.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I believe, and yet I ask for your grace to help me in the places where I need greater faith. Help me connect what I believe about your love, your grace, and your

transforming power to those places I am still holding on so I may experience your resurrection here and now and the freedom you give us to live with abundance, hope and joy. Amen.

Friday: Revelation 21:1-6

Going Deeper: We end the week as we began it, with words from scripture that the typical time we hear them is at a funeral. And yet their meaning reaches far deeper into our daily lives. The image of a new Jerusalem represents the Kingdom of God that Jesus told us was breaking into our world through him. He was God's messenger that The Messages captures so clearly... *"Look! Look! God has moved into the neighborhood, making his home with men and women! They're God's people, he's their God. He'll wipe every tear from their eyes. Death is gone for good – tears gone, crying gone, pain gone – all the first order of things gone."* (Rev. 21:3-4) The truth is, even though the Kingdom of God is inbreaking, we still experience loss, we still feel sadness, and we still feel pain and suffering, so what is this all about? The message in these words is that we are not held captive to our sorrow, and loss. Yes we feel still them but by faith we now know they are not the final answer! God is with us, that is clearly evident in the Crucifixion of Jesus. God takes on our pain, our fear, our rejection... the worse humanity has to offer and meets us in it and redeems it through the resurrection of his son. The Cross is more than a symbol of life after death, it is a declaration God is with us and God will never leave us.

Prayer: At the end of this week, I thank you my God, you who are greater than death and not only the author of life but also the restorer of life. As I remember those who have died in the last year, or even longer ago I lean on my faith in you who are resurrection and who holds their life, as well as mine in your strong and yet tender arms of mercy. Wipe away my tears and comfort my sorrow... as I rest in my trust in your love that will not let me go. Amen.