

“It’s Summer Vacation, Not ‘Worship Vacation’ 😊”

A sermon by Pastor Steve Easterday-McPadden
for First UMC, Grand Junction, Sunday, June 7, 2020

This sermon can be listened to on the FUMCGJ
website: www.fumcgj.org/media/

Scripture Text: *The 23rd Psalm [NRSV]*

OPENING

- And here’s an alternate version of that beloved psalm, entitled “Psalm of Summer”

Now it came to pass that, once again, spring turned to summer at which point God’s people raised their voices and said:

“Recreation is my shepherd, I shall not stay at home;

“He maketh me to lie down in a sleeping bag;

“He leadeth me down the Interstate each weekend.

“He restoreth my suntan;

“He leadeth me to State Parks for comfort’s sake.

“Even though I stray on the Lord’s Day, I will fear no reprimand,

“for Thou art with me.

“My rod and my reel they comfort me.

“I anointest my skin with oil, but my gas tank runneth dry;

“Surely my trailer shall follow me all the weekends of the summer,

“and I shall return to the House of the Lord in the fall.”

But then it is hunting season...and that’s another psalm. – *Anonymous*

[Source: <https://bible.org/illustration/psalm-summer>]

SERMON THOUGHTS

- Deal with the humor in this, but also the seriousness of it.
 - ✓ This is not a scolding sermon/message; it is simply one to serve as a reminder of our priorities.

TO THE SCRIPTURES

- Verse-by-verse exposition of Psalm 23

The first 3 verses are a proclamation, a declarative statement, a sermon if you will, about the Psalmist’s (traditionally, David) convictions about the role of the Lord in his life.

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;*

³ *he restores my soul.*

*He leads me in right paths
for his name’s sake.*

But at verse 4, the address changes, and it becomes a prayer – a word to God that we overhear, as it were. David speaks of intimacy with God; they are words of

deep conviction concerning his trust in God's provisions for him.

⁴ *Even though I walk through the ... [valley of the shadow of death], I fear no evil;*

for you are with me;

(*Ref. Brother Lawrence and *The Practice of the Presence of God* (RDMc Publishing, 2012)*)

your rod (an offensive tool) and your staff (a defensive tool) — 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.

And, at verse 6, the address changes back to proclamation again:

⁶ *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,*

and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord... [forever].

Work with the Hebrew root, רָדַף, behind the (mis-) translation “follow”. It really means “pursue” or “chase”.

SERMON THOUGHTS

- The ironic timing of this: the realization that we can remain a vital congregation, even when prevented, as we have been of late, from “doing church” as has been done for millennia – in person.
 - ✓ It is difficult to overstate the significance of this lesson: Having a Sanctuary in which to gather

is simply not necessary to being a Village of Faith.

✓ So, what does taking a “worship vacation” vs. a “summer vacation” really mean? That’s something for each of us to grapple with and answer for ourselves. I can say that I am singularly impressed and grateful for how everyone I know of in the congregation has remained invested in your faith and in our Church, our congregation, as an expression of your faith.

✓ And so, I wish you all a blessed, safe, renewing, and joyful summer – in other words a refreshing summer vacation, knowing you know the difference b/w that and a “worship vacation!”

TRANSITION TO COMMUNION

BENEDICTION: Given the attention to the Hebrew language in relation to the rich meaning of the Psalm, give the Aaronic Blessing from Numbers 6:24-26.

²⁴ **יְבָרֶכֶךָ יְהוָה וְיִשְׁמְרֶךָ: ס**

The Lord bless you and keep you;

²⁵ **יֵאָר יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיַּחַנְךָ: ס**

²⁵ the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you;

²⁶ **יִשָּׂא יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיִּשֶׂם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם: ס**

²⁶ the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.