

This week I have been pondering the question: “What does it really mean to trust in God?” In a time where fear and uncertainty are rampant how can we as the people of God remain calm and trust in God to lead us forward?

Throughout my life I have seen God do some amazing things. Whether it was healing a person who I thought was going to die or facilitating redemption in a family that had been strained for years, God always makes a way forward when it seems like there is no way.

Even in this time of social isolation and distancing I have seen God make a way forward. The church has moved beyond the walls and is answering its call to help our neighbors. I don’t know about you, but this week I have heard several heart-warming stories about people helping each other.

Whether it is family members who are standing outside of nursing homes to wish their loved one happy birthday or neighbors picking up groceries for those unable to go out to the stores, people are rising to the occasion to care for one another.

Today through our Scripture God reminds us that we have been through really difficult moments in the past, but God made a way for us and led us forward. God is the “good shepherd” who cares of us, the sheep.

In the Old Testament book of Exodus, the Israelites thought they were facing certain death. They had just left Egypt under the leadership of Moses, but now the Egyptians were coming after them, But God provided a way forward. God parted the Red Sea and saved their lives.

Looking at the Israelites at this moment they had no choice but to trust in God, this was their only way out.

We now find ourselves in this same position. The comforts of life have been stripped away from us. We really have two choices on how to move forward: We can either be paralyzed by fear or we can fully put our trust in God.

This experience has made us all realize it is not the material things in life that our precious it is our very lives and our community. In his book, “The God We Can Know,” Rob Fuquay asks a thought-provoking question in the first chapter. He asks: “What do I have that cannot be reduced to ashes?”ⁱ

I believe through this question Fuquay is trying to help us see this very same phenomenon that the things that matter the most in this life are not material, but spiritual.

On this fourth Sunday of Lent we continue in this time of wilderness. Like my friend Pastor Darcey Johnson said recently, “This is the most lenty lent we have had.” We truly do feel like we are wandering in the wilderness and there are signs of death and ashes all around us.

People are mourning. Mourning the way life used to be. High School and College seniors are mourning their last semester and that most of their graduations have been moved online. People are mourning the loss of jobs, especially those in the hotel and restaurant industry. People are mourning the loss of community. We are created to be together and we have had to distance ourselves from one another which is painful. We are mourning the sense of security we used to have as a nation as we live in this uncertain time.

Like many people who mourned in the Bible our days have been filled with sackcloth and ashes as we mourn our lives as we knew them.

It is okay to mourn and is even biblical. Just read through the book of Job, Psalms, or Lamentations. But there is a healthy way to mourn and it has three parts:

- 1) Name what we are mourning.
- 2) Ask for God to help us.
- 3) Thank God that God is still with us and is moving in the world.

This is the movement of so many of our Psalms throughout the Bible. We even see this pattern in Psalm 23 which is written by King David. We started this season of Lent by reading another psalm by King David, Psalm 51 in which David asks God to “create in me a clean heart O God and renew a right spirit within me.”

Here in Psalm 23 David asks God to lead him forward and be his shepherd. David may have referred to God this way because this was his frame of reference. Before David was a king, he was shepherd. This is where they found him tending the sheep with the Samuel came to his father’s house led by God to help lead the people of God forward (1 Samuel 16:11).

This is how David experienced God in his life, as shepherd and we see this through his writing of Psalm 23.

- 1) In Psalm 23 David shares what he is mourning: “Yea thou I walk through the valley of the shadow of death...”

Now we know that David went through a lot of difficult times during his leadership: from struggling with his own sin, to the death of his first child, to people not responding to his leadership. But David does not stay in this place.

- 2) Instead of asking God for help, David names how God is helping him:
 - David names all the ways God is leading him from death to life:
“You make me to lie down in green pastures, you lead me beside the still waters, you restore my soul” (Psalm 23:2-3).
- 3) God presence is with him and because of that “[he] will dwell in the house of the Lord forever” (Psalm 23:6).

One of the biggest blessing in our lives is that God is not constrained to the four walls of the church. God is with us all the time and through the Holy Spirit we are able to feel that God is with us. Also, we are able to join with each other in community through our love and worship of God. When we worship God we are not alone and we are raising our voices with people all over the world.

I love how David understood God as shepherd, the one who would guide us forward to life.

We see the fulfilment of God as Shepherd through Jesus Christ in John 10. Jesus talks about how the good shepherd is the one who enters through the gate and keeps his sheep safe.

Just as we heard about God as shepherd in Psalm 23, here Jesus shows the people that He will lead them forward into an abundant life (John 10:10). Here Jesus refers to himself as the “gate” showing that he will give his life for his people. Rob Fuquay give us some more insight to the life of a shepherd and the sheep he says: “Shepherds use folds to keep their sheep at night. These enclosures provided walls, but the door was just a bare entrance. No gate.”ⁱⁱ

What is amazing is that the shepherd would become the door.ⁱⁱⁱ The shepherd would lay down in the open entry way and protect the sheep from whatever threat came their way. Rob Fuquay tells us: “This is what people would have pictured when Jesus said: “I am the [gate] for the sheep.”^{iv}

This context is important for us today as many of us would have literally pictured a door or a gate and not a person.

Knowing this information, we see that Jesus was telling the people that just as God protected the people, Jesus also would lead them forward.

Jesus ends sharing about himself in this way saying: “¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).

Our God is a God of abundance. We will also have enough with God.

At this moment in time it is so easy to live in the mindset of scarcity thinking we don't have enough...wondering if we will have enough to weather this time of isolation.

But God tells us all throughout the Bible that God will provide for our needs and will lead us forward if only we will follow.

We trust in God, when we fully surrender everything and follow God's will for our lives. This means during this time of perceived scarcity we don't given into fear that “steals, kills, and destroys” our joy” (John 10:10).

We are not called to wait around to receive God's abundance, we are called to be part of it. We are called to be part of Jesus miracles in the world today.

Last week I reached out to a family that I knew may not have all the supplies they needed. When thinking about how I could help I thought about going to the store and getting them some groceries, but my son, Dean was with me and I knew that wouldn't be possible. So, I looked around my house and realized we had more than enough resources to share.

This is how we shift our mindset from scarcity to abundance. We already have what we need, and we are called to share our abundance with others.

We do this by volunteering at the food pantry, through donating funds to the discretionary fund, or by dropping off food to those who can't go to the store. We offer God's abundance when we fill ourselves with the love of God.

The good news for our lives today is that God will continue to provide for us in abundance and lead us forward with hope. May we not be afraid to follow and surrender. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Endnotes

ⁱ Rob Fuquay. “The God We Can Know.” P. 21.

ⁱⁱ Ibid. P. 61& 62.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid. P. 62

^{iv} Ibid. P. 62.

Additional Resource

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Keck et al. “The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary.” Vol. IX. Abingdon Press. Nashville, TN. 1995.