

The Lord is My Shepherd Psalm 23

Intro

Welcome to Asbury Online worship service. In this difficult time with the coronavirus pandemic, I pray for the safety and wellness of our Asbury family members and all people who are affected by it. I hope you are well and safe while you join our worship service from home.

We are living in a completely new world today. The novel coronavirus has impacted our daily lives and changed a lot of things. Personally, it has made me wash my hands more often than I used to. Buying toilet paper has become one of the most difficult shopping missions to accomplish. It has changed our greetings. Instead of handshaking, we do elbow bumps, namaste greeting or bowing. All students are having an unexpected vacation and college students are being sent back to their homes.

Of course, this virus has forced churches to change our way of doing worship services as well. I never imagined that in-person Sunday worship service would be canceled because of a virus. I guess that many of you may feel a little strange and a bit awkward watching your computer during this time of worship. Some of you may feel that you are not participating in worship but watching a show. That's o.k. I feel the same as you. I have had some experiences preaching to empty pews but I have never preached to a camera so I am a little nervous.

Though no one likes this new situation, it reminds us of many truths we have forgotten. The church is not a building but people. Although we are not able to do in-person worship services, we are still the church. You are the church. If you have gathered to worship God at your home, your home becomes the church. So Pay attention to God who is with you now and give God your reverence at this time of worship.

Unprecedented situations reveals our mortality.

In the outbreak of coronavirus, I have often heard the word, "Unprecedented." "the Coronavirus crisis is unprecedented." "We're living in unprecedented times." "The government has taken unprecedented steps to respond to the coronavirus." "Unprecedented" means something novel or unique. 'Something unprecedented' has a revelatory character of being a new point of comparison.

Our daily lives have been radically changed by the pandemic and this unprecedented situation has revealed many things. It reveals those things which we have taken for granted are real blessings. Having a cup of coffee with friends at a coffee shop, visiting parents or friends at nursing homes, going out grocery shopping without worrying about a supply shortage, hugging during the time of passing the peace at the church, and in-person worship service itself... are blessings.

The coronavirus outbreak also has revealed the fragility of things we have relied on for our living. It shows how fragile our economic, social, and medical systems are. The bull market that seemed to go on forever has ended and the stock market has plunged. Grocery store shelves are empty. Doctors appointments have to be rescheduled. The DMV and other government in-person services are closed.

So many people are suffering from this unprecedented crisis. During the week, I have visited the Korean restaurant of a Zion Korean church member. Since the state government has banned dine-in service, the restaurant was empty. There was nothing I could do for them except to pray. I know that prayer is the best thing we can do for others but as a pastor, watching my

church members going through hard times is really sad and difficult for me. I know some of you who are small business owners or hourly employees were hit hard by the coronavirus. I am praying for you. If you have prayer concerns or just need someone to talk to, please contact me.

Also, the coronavirus outbreak has revealed the myth of American unity. Do you know “what’s spreading faster than the coronavirus in the US? Racist assaults and ignorant attacks against Asians.”¹ With the outbreak of the coronavirus, increasing numbers of Asian American children and students have experienced harassment and discrimination and even physical attack. Coronavirus fears have stigmatized Asian Americans making them the ‘yellow peril.’² I hope that you don’t see me as “the yellow peril.” I know you don’t. But coronavirus fear has stimulated racial anxiety and has affected people.

When uncontrolled natural disasters like this coronavirus hit a society, people tend to look for a scapegoat to blame for the tragedy. Some politicians have already tried to label this virus with a certain ethnic connotation like “the Chinese virus” or “Kung-flu.” This labeling is not a neutral description of the origin of virus but it is an attempt to manipulate the fear and anger of people and channel it toward others. This is a clear example of scapegoating of others for their own political benefit. Some say, “a good leader is to lead people to face fear with compassion and hope, not with anger and division.” So whether you are liberal or conservatives, please pray for leaders of this nation to be good leaders! This is our duty as Christians.

The Lord is my Shepherd! Trust Psalm

The unprecedented coronavirus situation reveals the fragility of our lives and the impermanence of our economic and social structures. Fundamentally, it reveals the mortality of life. This situation reminds us of the message of Ash Wednesday. “Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return.” When we acknowledge that we are mortal and we cannot control everything, we know what to do.

The good news is that God does not abandon us. Psalm 23 speaks powerfully to us in troubled times. The Psalms are poetry so the best way to explore there meaning is simply reading them.

Scripture Reading

Psalm 23

1 The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
2 He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
3 he refreshes my soul.
He guides me along the right paths
for his name’s sake.
4 Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,

¹ <https://www.mercurynews.com/2020/02/21/whats-spreading-faster-than-coronavirus-in-the-us-racist-assaults-and-ignorant-attacks-against-asians/>

² <https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/coronavirus-fears-show-how-model-minority-asian-americans-become-yellow-ncna1151671>

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 your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord
forever.

Psalm 23 is known as a trust psalm. King David put his complete trust in God even in the time of crisis. His trust is rooted in God's promise and God's promise to king David was simple. "I am with you." In response to God's promise, David confesses. "I fear no evil, for you are with me." I may be surrounded by enemies, but "you prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies." Because he trusts God's promise, he fears no evil and finds peace in troubled times.

My friend, God is with us still. We may have only a little faith and often fail to follow, but Jesus has promised, "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

Instead of reacting to this unprecedented situation in fear... instead of searching for a scapegoat to blame for this crisis, trust God's promise and let us walk through this darkest valley together. Everything will pass including this coronavirus pandemic but God's promises are forever.

Some people may not feel the presence of God and trust God's promise because their fear and anxiety in this unusual situation are so real and strong. What they need is for the community who surrounds them in spirit to hold them up in love. You can be a channel of God's assurance and comfort for them.

Since we need to keep our social distance for the safety of all, call them to check how they are doing or send cards to comfort and encourage them. And of course, pray for them! Here's what I am suggesting to the Asbury family. From today, stop what you are doing at 9 p.m. and pray for those who are ill. Pray for hospital staff, and medical researchers who are fighting against this virus. Pray for those who work at grocery stores and provide other essential services. Pray for the leaders of this nation. And Pray for the church.

The Lord is our good shepherd and we lack nothing. Be safe and strong. God is with you. Amen.