

15 Journeying in Grace

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Renewed in Mercy

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT, YEAR A

This year, the lectionary once again gives us a very familiar text. Whether read at a baptism, wedding, or funeral, Psalm 23 has accompanied many of us through important moments in our lives.

REFERENCES

1 Samuel 16:1-13

Psalm 23

Ephesians 5:8-14

John 9:1-41

COLORS

Purple

This year, the lectionary once again gives us a very familiar text. Whether read at a baptism, wedding, or funeral, Psalm 23 has accompanied many of us through important moments in our lives. The beauty of the lectionary, though, is that we regularly encounter these familiar texts during weekly worship and within the flow of our ordinary life together. This Sunday, we come to the still waters, the valley of the shadow of death, and the table surrounded by our enemies in the context of Lent and in juxtaposition with Paul's call to live as children of the light. What new insights might Psalm 23 offer us in this context?

One way to help our congregations experience Psalm 23 anew is to sing the psalm and/or experience multiple translations of the psalm within worship. Perhaps you begin your service by singing "Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us" (*United Methodist Hymnal* 381), followed by readings of Psalm 23 in two or three different translations. Or perhaps you read the same translation of Psalm

23 several times, inviting the congregation to engage in a communal practice of lectio divina. You could even weave a song into the reading of Psalm 23, alternating between the reading of the psalm and a sung verse of a hymn based on Psalm 23. The goal is for congregants to experience Psalm 23 in a new way, disrupting their assumptions about the text so they can encounter mercy anew.

Consider also how you might incorporate Ephesians 5 into the service. It is easy to emphasize the light versus darkness motif in Paul, but we must do so carefully. We want those gathered to recognize the nuance of darkness in reality versus Paul's metaphorical use of darkness and light to make his point. Ultimately, Paul calls us to prayers of confession, passing the peace, responses to the Word, and benedictions that bring all things into the light so that we may choose to follow God instead of being drawn away from God by the sins we keep hidden from ourselves and our neighbors. Thus, worship becomes a practice ground for the journey of grace, a place where we work together to bring what is hidden into the light, a gathering where we support one another through all the hills and valleys of life, and an encounter with grace that empowers us to live in God's goodness and mercy out in the world.

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