

“God Gave Me everything I Need”

Psalm 23, John 10:1-7

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The Bible has many images to describe the relationship between God and us. One of the most popular metaphors is “shepherd”. Both of today’s Scripture readings commonly express that God is our Shepherd and we are His sheep. Especially, Psalm 23 is one of the most beloved poems among Christians. The essence of the shepherd is not found in the economic class or social status, but in the close relationship with the sheep. In ancient Israel times, the role of the shepherds was to protect their flock and stay with them every day and night as does a mother care for her new born baby. A shepherd would never leave the flock alone. So the title of the shepherd naturally had reputation as ‘the most trustworthy guide’ and ‘protector’ for the sheep with a sense of accountability even though most shepherds were poor. The true shepherd is with his sheep even in the most difficult times. Palm 23 describes the darkest valley as the most difficult, scary and dangerous situation where we struggle by ourselves. Ironically, the expression that we are the sheep explains that we are the ones who constantly worry about our safety and security. That’s what we seek and desire to gain in our faith.

This morning, I invite you to find another spiritual metaphor that represents your soul besides the sheep in today’s readings. It is the image of a “cup”. In Psalm 23:5, it says “You anoint my head with oil; *my cup overflows.*” Let’s practice spiritual imagination together. Imagine that God is the potter and you are the clay. What if God creates you as a cup, what kind of cup do you prefer to be and what do you desire to hold in your cup? I love cups. I like to collect unique shapes of coffee cups. Especially when I travel to a new place, I always look for a new cup for a souvenir. As a potter makes a cup, God creates you and me with special purpose and unique design. Each of us is God’s unique creation. No potter would make cups without purpose. Every cup has its own destiny. Each cup is created to meet a certain need.

In the same way, each of us is created out of God’s love to be God’s glory and joy. The divine potter made us and how do we know God’s purpose? This is the creation of the soul. God made you your soul for God’s holy purpose. We need to discern God’s divine purpose as we walk through our lives. I imagine that soul can be compared to a glass cup with a candle inside and the soul connects us to the divine God. (Note that I am lighting a candle to represent God’s presence in us) Think of this as your soul. We cannot light this candle on

our own. Only God can do this for us and assures us his love in our soul. When this candle lit, it warms up our soul and we are fully connected to the Divine. Is your candle lit? Do you feel spiritually in despair or hopeless, what can you do for your soul? I want to share a song, “My Eyes Are Dry” composed by Keith Green, a Christian musician. It always inspires and helps me when my soul is down and out of spirit. Please listen to this song and focus on his words while you enjoy music for a minute. Think of the oil as our lit candle.

My eyes are dry by Keith Green (1978)

*My faith is old
My heart is hard
My prayers are cold
And I know how I ought to be
Alive to You and dead to me*

*But what can be done
For an old heart like mine
Soften it up
With oil and wine
The oil is You, Your Spirit of love
Please wash me anew
With the wine of Your Blood*

When the candle is not lit in our souls, as this song reminds us, our prayers will be cold, our faith will be old and hearts will be hard. What can be done to restore our faith or rekindle our souls to be connected to God? The answer seems to be hard but it is simple. During Lenten period, we had studied John Wesley’s life and his faith journey. When John Wesley returned to England after missionary failures in America, he was spiritually down and questioned his faith. He struggled with his faith as a preacher. He knew that he believed in God and the power of God, but he had not yet come to understand the experience of grace in his own work. Wesley’s spiritual coach, the Moravian Peter Bohler encouraged Wesley to preach faith till you have it, and then, because you have it you will preach faith. I encourage you to take Peter Bohler’s spiritual advice as yours. You don’t have to practice preaching. Instead practice your prayer. As Apostle Paul exhorts us, wherever you are in the stages of your life, do not stop praying, but continue to be in touch with God through prayer.

While John Wesley was practicing his faith, he experienced the personal presence of God inside his soul. At a church meeting in Aldesgate Street, he had a special experience feeling Christ in his soul. He was assured that God’s love

was in his soul. In short, John Wesley felt that God loves him!! This is the key that we deeply seek and desire to know and experience. God loves you! When our souls are filled up with God's gifts of love, joy and hope, we do not fear anything. Even though we might walk through the darkest valley, we fear no evil. The Bible does not specify what evil might look like, but whatever it is, we have enough strength and power to deny it.

In a sense, we are God's vulnerable sheep. We live in a world where fear and anxiety always try to dominate us. And we have an uncertain future. Some of us are fearful about loss, such as health and separation from our loved ones. "the darkest valley" does not only mean "the valley of the shadow of death". Truly our souls need a companion who can hold our hands and boldly walk with us side by side. Our God is the right companion and shepherd. Please check on your soul if it has any leaks or dirty part that need to be repaired and be cleansed in your cup. I would call this "your spiritual diagnosis". Ask yourself with this question, "How is my soul?" Life is not a flat road. Our spirituality has a similar pattern. We need to check in ourselves. Only God's love can fill and overflow our cups. When your soul is lit and filled up with God's love, you will fear no evil and take bold steps to move forward. Believe that God loves you. He is like a shepherd taking risks and laying down his life for the sake of his sheep. You can trust in God.

Steve Garnass-Holmes a Methodist pastor and contemporary writer writes, "God is closer to me than my fear. I feel God's hand on my back. My cup is full to spilling with blessing. You are my hidden companion; goodness and mercy are my shadows; you are my house, my breath, my life."¹ I hope and pray that God will fill your soul with His love and be with you in your journey. Amen.

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