



The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

Sermon: Year B – Fourth Sunday of Easter – April 22, 2018, Jesus and the Kidron Valley

Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil. For thou art with me.

Thus says the 23rd Psalm.

I walk through the valley. Personally, when I think of valleys, I think of the valleys of Hawai'i—valleys like Hanalei on Kauai; Manoa here on Oahu; Iao and Makamakaole on Maui; Pololu, Waipio, and Honokanenui back home on the Big Island.

In Hawai'i, our valleys are lush, with verdant streams running through them. Our valleys are full of life, and they are life-giving, giving us sustenance off the land.

But the 23rd Psalm says: *Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death*; not life, but death. When I was in seminary one of my classmates told me that during the Holocaust, she heard that when Jewish children went to the gas chambers, some of them went to their deaths reciting the Psalms. Imagine. To feel so close to God, even at the moment of a cruel and violent death at the hands of an oppressor.

And when I recalled that the other day, somehow it shook loose one of those interesting childhood memories from the cobwebs of my mind that I forgot I even had. When I was a little kid in the 1970s, I had permission to stay up late for two mini-series on television. One was *Roots* by Alex Haley and the other was *Holocaust*, starring Sir John Gielgud who played a Jewish teacher during World War II.

When John Gielgud's character went to the gas chamber and as the pellets that executed him were dropped in from the ceiling above, he fell to the floor and recited the 23rd Psalm. That always struck me as odd because I thought of it as a Christian prayer; but now, of course, I realize that the psalm was written by David, King David, King of the Jews.

And if the 23rd Psalm is indeed Jewish, then undoubtedly it was a prayer and a psalm that was recited by Jesus himself, a very devout Jew.

And that notion reminds me of yet another valley; not one of the lush valleys that we have here in Hawai'i, but of a dry, desolate valley—the Kidron Valley in the Holy Land, the Kidron Valley that skirts the eastern wall of the Temple of Jerusalem from the Garden of Gethsemane up to the home of Caiaphas, the High Priest. After Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, he walked through the Kidron Valley and up to the place where he was denied by Peter and from where he walked to the Roman Governor's palace the next morning, the home of Pilate, where he was condemned to die.

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Imagine then, the 23rd Psalm being prayed through the eyes of Jesus and coming off his lips:

Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil. For thou art with me.

I'm sure Jesus believed those words to their core and that they provided him with a sense of solace and peace as he trod that lonesome valley *en route* to Calvary and the cross.

Think of the Passion of Jesus. Think of the Holocaust during World War II. Life doesn't guarantee us perpetual serenity, does it? And that's why we need goodness and mercy to follow us all the days of our lives, helping us in ways we cannot help ourselves, giving us comfort and solace in times and circumstances that seem insurmountable.

Mercy is needed everywhere we go because of our human condition – our mistakes and our places of unawareness. And Jesus needed mercy because of our mistakes and because of our places of unawareness – the mistake of condemning him to die and our unawareness that he was the Messiah, the Son of God.

And I'm not talking only about 2000 years ago, but also today. We crucify the Christ we're called to see in one another in various and sundry ways: through vengeance, backbiting, gossip, subjugation, marginalization, along with all the isms that prevail in our society today; isms like racism, sexism, classism, and the list goes on.

And if you don't think we crucify, just think of the images we saw on the news last week of Syrian children washing the effects of chemical weapons off their skin and out of their eyes. We still crucify today—whether metaphorically or literally, we still crucify today.

So, thank goodness that God's goodness is everywhere and that we can tap into it, because God knows we need it – just like Jesus needed it as he trod the road from the Garden of Gethsemane to the cross of Calvary in the Kidron Valley.

As Kent French says so poignantly:

Since the darkness is in death's shadow and not death itself, the pilgrim may continue on. He [sic] will go forth without fear. The rod and the staff, the shepherd's instruments of prodding, directing, and defending, are ever present. The shepherd uses these tools to protect the sheep, to ward off the death shadow and evildoers, and to continue corralling the sheep where they need to go.

Jesus needed to go to Calvary. And he needed to be placed in the tomb from which he resurrected. He needed to go.

So the next time we recite the 23rd Psalm, whether it's at a funeral or in the Lectionary or during our times of private devotion and prayer, I ask that we pray it through the eyes of Jesus and off his lips.

And I ask that as we pray, that we also we walk with him through the Kidron Valley and that we believe that in the midst of *our* trials and tribulations that there is promise and hope to come, promise and hope in the Resurrection and promise and hope in life with the Risen Lord.

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

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He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Amen.