

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

May 11, 2019

Community Prayer Service

Psalm 23

I am tired. How about you?

Tired to the point I feel I can't quite make it through the day. Exhausted when I get home. With little interest in the things that should matter and too tired to do the things that need to be done. Running from place to place, trying to be everything to everybody, trying to get it right, and usually falling short of my own expectations and having things simply fall through the cracks.

Sound familiar? It's that moment when you say something's got to give.

I was talking to my 18 year old son the other night. He's about to go off to college in the fall. He has worked his butt off to get good grades and do all of the right things to get into college. He was editor of the yearbook and the school literary magazine. He was captain of his swim team. He had the lead in the school play. He is at the top of this class. He is exhausted.

For all of his effort, he got into lots of great schools. The expectation that he would choose a big name school was heavy. His friends had expectations. His family had expectations. His teachers had expectations. He had tried to live into all of them. To keep working harder, to keep less sleep...but at the end of the day at least he would be a success.

The result was full blown exhaustion. His constant need to be a success was driving him beyond his limit. And every time he didn't get the best grade he would beat himself up for not reading a little more, for not studying a little longer, for not remembering all of the right answers, for not having enough time to meet all of those external "expectations."

So, it came as a surprise when he chose a school that no one expected. He didn't go with the big name. He went with his heart. Something inside of him recognized that the rat race of living up to everyone's else's expectations needed to end.

He went with the college choice that gave him a sense of belonging and meaning. Where the people were kind and the welcome was warm. Where opportunities to contribute were abundant and where he knew he could make a difference and where he could give back to something greater than himself. It was against everyone's expectations but it finally met his expectation, the expectation of his own gifts and his own calling. And a funny thing is starting to happen....he is getting some rest. He smiles more and laughs more. He is happy.

I am thankful.

The college decision process has taught me something important that we have often missed in our rush for achievement, in our haste to make it big, to be the best, and get to the top. It has reminded me that we simply get tired and disconnected with the things that truly matter if we don't stop and reevaluate our priorities.

We miss the needs in our own hearts, in our families, and in our communities. We miss the need for connection, for caring, for conversation.

I loved reading Psalm 23 this week - in the midst of my own tiredness and my son's exhaustion.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters, he restores my soul....Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.

How I need to hear these words. Over and over again. How much I want to instill them in my children when the demands of this world are too overwhelming. How much I want them to know this promise of goodness and mercy when the expectations of others are pushing them to limits they cannot handle.

In our moments of exhaustion, we need to remember that the Lord is our shepherd...who stands beside us, who carries us and supports us when we can't get through another day on our own. The Lord is our shepherd who encourages us forward when we don't have the strength or the courage or the confidence to take another step. The Lord is our shepherd who protects us and reminds us that we are enough just as we are.

Amen.