

Fourth Sunday in Lent
March 26, 2017
The Rev. Jamie Samilio

Perspective

Perspective. This is a word that is very important if you are drawing landscapes, especially buildings, and as an artist I remember sitting in drawing class with grid paper as a guide and learning that in order to have correct perspective, you need a central point, or two in some cases, but the idea is that without this central point, everything you draw will be skewed and out of balance with everything around it.

I found when drawing buildings, I sometimes did not trust the central point, things looked like they were too close, small or there was not enough detail. Ultimately however, if I trusted that the central point would pull everything into proper perspective, all my lines would eventually come together to create a landscape where all the objects were in right relationship to each other.

Perspective as it relates to other things in our lives also allows us to see things from other's point of view. Knowing what the central point is of an argument, and understanding the point of view or perspective of others helps us to become in right relationship with each other, or at least come to understanding and develop empathy for others.

I wanted to talk about perspective before diving into the scripture, because in crafting this sermon, someone showed me how to look at the scripture from a point of view I had not imagined in countless readings of the text.

I chose to preach this morning on Psalm 23. Psalm 23 is likely the best known psalm I think we have, and it is very often read at funerals. The central point to Psalm 23 is that we can trust that God is ever present with us – the Lord is my shepherd.

I first became familiar with this Psalm because of my Uncle Punk (his name was Ivan, but everyone called him Punk). My uncle spent a lot of time in the dark woods and valleys of central Pennsylvania, hunting and fishing. He spent time in WWII sneaking across enemy lines and planting explosives on bridges and buildings used by our foes. In the years I knew him growing up I remembered the he had on his jacket that read: Lo though I walk through the valley of death in the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil, for I am the meanest "one: in the valley.

From a human perspective, from a self-reliant perspective, the patch my uncle wore reminded him not to be afraid, because he could take care of himself. But Psalm 23 is not about self reliance, it is about having trust in God, and acknowledging that God is with us and provides for us where we follow where He leads.

From whose perspective is the psalm written? Whose words are spoken in the psalm? For years, I imagined that I was the Shepherd, driving my sheep, but ever guided to make right decisions about what and where to feed my soul and the souls of others. Given strength and courage to walk through the dark times, and to face what I feared and protect others from fear as well. I imagined myself walking along with the sheep, God ever with me, and I imagined this scene as if it were a movie in my head that I was watching from the outside, removed from the scene a bit.

Think about it for a moment. Who is painting for us in words this lovely picture of green fields and still waters? Whose story is being told in these lines? From whose perspective are we seeing this story unfold? Where are you in the Psalm?

In the staff meeting, we usually take a few minutes to read, meditate and give feedback on the scripture that will be the focal point of the sermon. This week, Maude's comment was that clearly, the Psalm was written from the perspective of the sheep. This was a revelation to me. I was not the shepherd, I was watching the shepherd being guided from an outside perspective, because I am one of the sheep. We are all sheep, and it is Jesus who is the shepherd.

Let's look at the Psalm.

*The Lord is my shepherd; * I shall not be in want.*

I am not alone, and the Lord provides for my needs

*He makes me lie down in green pastures *and leads me beside still waters.*

Because of the Lords guidance, I shall not hunger or thirst.

*He revives my soul * and guides me along right pathways for his Name's sake.*

My joy in life is renewed in following His example to do justice, love kindness, and humbly walk in love.

*Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil; *
for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*

Even when I have self-doubt and fear, or when I am in peril, I know I am not alone and I trust God to be there with me as I face the challenges of this life.

*You spread a table before me in the presence of those who trouble me; *
you have anointed my head with oil, and my cup is running over.*

Even when I am surrounded by fear, and people who would see me harmed are near, You feed my soul and mark my head with an outward sign of my inward trust in you, and my soul overflows with grace and peace.

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

And if I abide in you Lord, and strive to please you in all that I do every day of my life, I trust that you abide in me, and that there will be a place for me in this life and in the next.

May the peace that passes all understanding be in your hearts, and in your minds. Trust that God is with you, and that you shall not hunger nor thirst, nor fear that you are alone.

The presence of God is all around us, it is only a matter of perspective how we see it in our everyday lives. Focus on Jesus, make Him the central point in your life, and then open your eyes and behold the Christ in each other. Amen