

Let us pray... Shepherding God, guide us in the midst of our busy days, that we may find time to rest... Invite us into your still waters, your green pastures, and restore our souls... Amen.

Being a Christian involves many teachings that are all rooted in love...

There is the well-known commandment to love your neighbor... There is the call to forgiveness... And the call to live into God's grace, goodness, and truth...

Because so much of what we are called to do, involves how we treat other people...

So it can be very hard to hear a gospel that starts out the way our gospel does.

When Jesus said to his disciples, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while."

Rest, despite the fact that it is meant to be relaxing, can be hard sometimes.

It is hard to carve out time in your week, let alone during your day, to find a moment of sabbath, of true rest, and being with God.

Which is why Psalm 23 is such a beautiful pairing with our gospel today...

It paints a loving picture, not only in our minds, but in our hearts of what our God, our Creator, our Shepherd wants for us...

And God, also knows how hard it is for us to do these things...

Which is why Psalm 23 starts out with the blatant truth... That it is God who makes us find time to rest...

As we hear in the Psalm... He makes me lie down in green pastures...

And I love that the color green is depicted so specifically here... And that it doesn't simply say pastures...

As this description could only come from someone who is really listening to God... Who is taking time to lie down...

Because it is only by laying down in the pasture that they see how green and lush it is...

Had they simply walked by they may not have noticed the pasture, nor the beauty and the serenity it offered them.

They are taking time to smell the roses.

And this image of green pastures, is quite relevant to us at St. John... As we are surrounded by lush and green pastures...

Pastures, that for the farmers is most likely a symbol of anything but rest... It is a constant reminder of the work they need to do...

And yet, the pasture needs time for itself... It needs time to grow, and can't always be tended to...

Which means these green pastures embody the cycle of both work and rest... The cycle of life, that God intended...

And then the next image is still waters... Note that it is not just waters...

These waters are still, which means they invite a sense of calm and rest, and are a reminder of rebirth, renewal, and baptism.

Because baptism is a beautiful reminder of who we belong to... Who loves us and leads us in this world...

Who wants you to find time to rest, and to take time for yourself...

Who wants you to truly enjoy that time of rest... Guilt free... Without thoughts of I should be doing this... Or I should do be doing that...

Because the work will always be there... The to-do list will always be there...

Just like we quickly discover in our Gospel... The people saw Jesus and his disciples leaving and they went after them to find them... So they could be healed and learn from Jesus...

And even though healing is important, and loving others is important...

It is equally as important to love yourself... To take time to rest so you can have the energy to do the work that needs to be done.

Because you are loved by a God who is always at work... So, you don't have to be...

And to honor that, I'm going to end by reading Psalm 23... I invite you to meditate on the words and to let the Holy Spirit guide you...

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures...

He leads me beside the still waters.

He restores my soul...

He leads 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 you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies: you anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever... Amen...