

Grace & Peace to you, Dear Friends,

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.**

In this time of COVID stress, this psalm indeed brings comfort: “**He restores my soul**”. That is a mantra (daily meditation) that can be repeated over & over to give comfort. – He restores my soul, he restores my soul, he restores my soul. It is truly amazing how comforting those sacred words can be.

Our theme for today is “**Be renewed and filled with hope.**”

The focus scripture is \*\*\*\*\* **Isaiah 40:25-31 READ \*\*\*\*\***

(the NRSV New Revised Standard Version is the recommended translation)

The book of Isaiah is very long, but full of so many wise & powerful messages that come from the HOLY ONE. “**Those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.**

**They shall mount up with wings like eagle’s.**” What a wonderful image!

Scholars agree that Isaiah is the supreme poet-prophet to come out of the Hebrew people. Jesus would have been very familiar with these passages. As a young Jewish boy he would have studied & memorized many sections. The beautiful music of Handel’s Messiah comes directly from these scriptures--”Comfort, comfort now my people.” The prominent themes are judgment, comfort and hope.

In 2021, we too seek salvation, renewal & hope. In so many ways, the human condition has not changed.

I read a story this week about a father, **Sam** and his 17 year old son, **Charles**. Sam had tried to be a good father, but he felt he had let his son, Charles, down. The older son, **Larry** was so very like him and they easily got along. Sam & Larry would hunt and work on cars together.--they understood each other. But Charles was different. He was much more sensitive than Larry. When Sam would blast Charles to motivate him to be more like his older brother, he could hear an alarm bell going off. Was he being the best father for Charles?

Sam, himself had received major doses of discipline and distance –the hard side of love-- from his own Dad. He explained it this way: “It’s my job to put clothes on their backs and food on the table; it’s their mother’s job to make them feel loved”.

However, what had happened? Charles had quit talking to his Dad and had withdrawn to a safe distance. He just kept out of his Dad’s way.

Like many others, Sam had been on the run from close relationships. For years, his wife and son had been pursuing him. But he had always kept a “comfortable” distance from them.

However, one day, things began to change. **Sam got a clear look at himself during a men’s retreat** at his church and the running stopped.

At the retreat, he came face to face with the fact that there are 2 sides of love. Like many men, he had become an expert on its hard side. He could hand out discipline, but not reach out to hug his son. In a heart beat he could call down a mistake Charles had made, but words of encouragement were rare.

At the men’s retreat, they did “**wait upon the Lord**” (sought guidance by meditation, prayer & listening to other Christian men.) A mother’s love is important, but a child desperately needs their father’s wholehearted love as well. The speaker said, “When was the last time you put your arms

around your son and told him that you loved him?” Sam listened and realized he had only been loving his son with the one side of love. Charles needed both sides of love from him. Sam had spent years hard-siding his son to gain his respect; what he had gained instead was his fear and resentment.

With this knowledge in mind, Sam talked his son into meeting him at the local pizza restaurant after football practice one afternoon.

“Hi Dad”, said Charles as he shook hands with him. Charles was 6’2 and his Dad was 6’4. Both were athletic men, strong and handsome. Sam took a big breath and said, “ I’ve been doing a lot of thinking lately. It’s been hitting me hard that this is your last summer at home. You’ll be off to college in the fall. Along with the bags of clothing you’ll be packing, you’ll also be taking emotional baggage that for 17 years I’ve helped you pack over the years. So I wanted us to spend some time together and if you could go back over the years and think back as far as you can—remember every time I’ve hurt your feelings and never made things right; every time I’ve made you feel unloved and inadequate by something I’ve said or done.

I know we are different people and I have been pretty hard on you. I’ve tried to push you into being the person I thought you should be. I realized I’ve spent little time listening to who you really want to become. I’d like us to talk and **I want to ask your forgiveness.** You don’t need to pack any negative baggage. I want you to know how much I love you and **how proud I am of you.**”

Charles had tears in his eyes as he unloaded years of hurt right there at the table in the restaurant. There was the subtle resentment he had always felt that no matter how hard he tried he could never quite live up to his older brother’s accomplishments. And there were many harsh comments that his father had made to motivate him, but had actually been discouraging and hurtful. Sam listened.

After dinner was over, a new relationship was beginning for them. They stood up and gave each other a warm bear hug. Two strong men with tears in their eyes. Those sitting near by were smiling at this obvious love they had for each other. **They were renewed & filled with hope for the future.**

This week I am preparing for Florence Bodkin’s funeral. She was a friend of Beulah Jones, Betty Annett, and Madeleine Cross. These women all knew how “to wait upon the Lord”. They witnessed for us what life is like when you serve with **the joy of compassion.**

May we too **wait upon the Lord** so to renew our strength and restore our body, mind & spirit as God intends for us. To God be the glory! AMEN!

#### For the Merry Heart:

1. Life is what we make of it, always has been, always will be.--Grandma Moses

2. I have a new incentive to do sit-ups: I put M&Ms between my toes.

3. Which vegetable was not permitted on the Mayflower? The Leek

4. What has no teeth, no mouth, but does have eyes? The Potato

THE GOOD NEWS # 16 will come out on February 21 . This is the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in LENT

Easter this year is April 4. Hopefully we will be able to be in the Sanctuary for the Easter Service.

Take care. Stay safe. Be at Peace.

Love & blessings to you & your dear ones,

Annalee