

SERMON
“Everything, Everywhere, All at Once”
Psalm 23
Sunday, April 30, 2023

Mr. Green peered over his fence and noticed that the neighbor’s little boy was in his backyard filling in a hole. Curious about what the youngster was up to, Mr. Green asked, “What are you doing, Jimmy?”

Tearfully, little Jimmy replied, “My goldfish died, and I’ve just buried him.”

“That’s an awfully large hole for a goldfish, isn’t it?” Mr. Green said.

Patting down the last bit of earth, little Jimmy replied, “That’s because he’s in your cat!”

Life has a way of throwing us for a loop; doesn’t it? Whether our life has been turned upside-down by the death of a goldfish, a cat, a medical diagnosis, or even your beloved pastor’s leaving; life throws us curve balls.

One of my favorite movies last year was the Oscar-winning film *Everything, Everywhere, All at Once*. Actress Michelle Yeoh plays a dissatisfied and overwhelmed Chinese-American laundromat owner who not only is being audited by the IRS; but whose husband is trying to serve her divorce papers. And if that wasn’t bad enough; she has a strained relationship with her daughter who is a lesbian. And on top of that she is keeping everything a secret from her overbearing and demanding Cantonese grandfather who is visiting her for the Chinese New Year.

Try balancing all of that! Not only is everything everywhere happening at once for Michelle Yeoh’s character; but her world and the multiverse itself is spinning out of control. And the only way it can be stopped is for her to connect to her superhuman doppelganger from a parallel universe.

This may seem a bit to science-fiction-y or Star Trek-like for most of you; but there is a universal truth buried in the plot of this Oscar-winning film: everything everywhere does happen all at once.

One of the hardest challenges for the Christian; however, is to maintain a faith that God; not only is working in our midst, but that we will not fear all those things that come our way. Holocaust survivor and activist Corrie Ten Boom once said; “*Worry is a cycle of inefficient thoughts whirling around a center of fear.*” To live in fear is indicative of our struggle to fully trust God. Even the Bible acknowledges the struggle we humans face as we try to make sense of it all. And that’s where today’s scripture passage from the Psalms comes into play. In a world in which “everything everywhere is happening all at once” Psalm 23 becomes more important for it promises that the Lord “*is our shepherd, we shall not be in want.*” God declares the psalmist gives us green pastures, quiet waters, a table of food and an overflowing cup.

Psalm 23 begins with the assurance that God: “*leads us beside quiet waters, he restores our souls.*” The original Hebrew words of the psalm say that God “*leads us beside waters of rest; he restores our life.*”

Geraldine Perriam, a researcher at the University of Glasgow, says that water does much more than just hydrate us; “*water evokes responses in us that are calming, energizing, and can lead to better health outcomes. Just being beside water has a de-stressing effect,*” she says. Homiletics says that in this hyperactive and exhausting world we live in, we need these quiet, still waters of rest.

Water has “*essential qualities,*” says geography professor Ronan Foley, such as keeping us alive and cleansing our bodies. In the sacrament of baptism, water is a sign of our cleansing from sin, and a sign of the new life that comes from following Jesus. When the Protestant Reformer Martin Luther began his debates against the established church of Rome, he found himself plagued with fears and anxieties; fears and anxieties so intense that he would become filled with doubt and discouragement. A historian once said of Luther; “*he lived a turbulent life, constantly debating his opponents and in danger from the authorities.*”

So, how did he handle this stress? Luther had a unique strategy: he would stand up, face down the devil that he believed to be tormenting him, and yell, “*I am baptized!*” He may have also written the same phrase in chalk on his desk, said one scholar: “*to remind himself, as he worked, of his unbreakable connection to Christ and to the communion of saints.*” The quiet waters of the 23rd psalm remind us of the waters of our baptism. “I am baptized!”

When everything everywhere happens all at once, we need to remember this important truth: God provides; not only water; but food, protection and hospitality. Psalm 23 proclaims that the Lord is my shepherd. That implies we are his sheep. And what do sheep eat? They eat grass. Our shepherd, declares the psalmist, *“makes us lie down in green pastures”* — that’s the grass we sheep need for food!

David then sings forth; *“Even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we will fear no evil; for you are with us; your rod and your staff, they comfort us”* — that’s the protection we sheep need!

And then what does the psalmist promise? *“That our shepherd will prepare a table before us, anoint our heads with oil, and cause our cups to overflow”* — that, says Henry Briton writing for Homiletics, *“is hospitality!”*

In his book on prayers, theologian and biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann writes this prayer:

*“When the world spins crazy,
spins wild and out of control
spins toward rage and hate and violence,
spins beyond our wisdom and nearly beyond our faith,
When the world spins in chaos as it does now among us ...
We are glad for sobering roots that provide ballast in the storm.
So we thank you for our rootage in communities of faith,
for our many fathers and mothers who have believed and trusted as firm witnesses to us, for their
many stories of wonder, awe, and healing ...
And when we meet you hiddenly,
we find the spin not so unnerving,
because from you the world again has a chance
for life and sense and wholeness.
We pray midst the spinning, not yet unnerved,
but waiting and watching and listening,
for you are the truth that contains all our spin. Amen.”*

This is the Good News of the 23rd Psalm. Even though everything everywhere all at once seems to be spinning out of control; our Good Shepherd Jesus Christ himself is, as Bruggeman calls him; *“The truth that contains all our spin.”* In other words, keep your focus on him and you won’t find yourself as easily getting lost in the spin of this world.

Bible scholar J. Clinton McCann says that; *“The proper response to the good news of Psalm 23 and the good news of Jesus Christ is trust.”* When we trust, says McCann, *“we discover that life is not a reward to be earned; but a gift to be accepted.”* When we look at life as a reward instead of as a gift, we find ourselves becoming worn out and discouraged, says McCann.

One of the greatest of the miracles of Jesus, the feeding of the 5,000, occurs on a grassy hillside like the setting of the 23rd psalm. There, Jesus became a Good Shepherd, one who; as Matthew 14:14 says; *“had compassion on [the people] and healed their sick.”* In that peaceful place, on a grassy hillside, Jesus became the shepherd predicted by the Old Testament prophets. He became the long-awaited Son of David — the shepherd who feeds his people, protects them and saves them. To this day he continues to give us what we need for life, and to show us that life is a gift to be accepted.

But at the same time, Jesus challenges us to extend his compassion to others, especially when everything everywhere all at once is happening all around us. There on that grassy hillside in Matthew’s Gospel when the first disciples were feeling overwhelmed by the crowd, Jesus said to them, *“you give them something to eat.”* The disciples were mystified by this, of course, since they had only five loaves and two fish. But after Jesus blessed the bread and the disciples served the multitudes; we are told: *“there was enough for everyone plus leftovers.”* Notice: Jesus didn’t feed the crowd himself; he gave the loaves to the disciples, and then the disciples fed the people.

That’s exactly what we are challenged to do today: To take what Jesus gives us and share it with others. *“You give them something to eat,”* he says to us, and then he gives us what we need to feed the world around us. We do this when we serve meals for needy neighbors through the food pantry here at church. We do this when

we pledge our money to the mission and ministry of the church. We do this when we welcome visitors to a service of worship. We do this when we provide scholarships at our local YMCA so the children in our neighborhood have a safe place to swim.

So, where does one go when life becomes chaotic and overwhelming? When everything everywhere all at once is happening all around us? The 23rd Psalm tells us to go to our shepherd: Jesus Christ himself, who has given us everything we need. *“Surely goodness and love will follow us all the days of our life,”* promises the psalm, *“where we will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”* This is the place to live and share with others, when everything everywhere all at once is happening all around us.