

## **This Crazy Thing Called Life**

1. Warm-up Question: At the outset of Sunday’s sermon, we imagined ourselves in the doctor’s office getting a shot. Jeff asked whether we prefer to be told when the nurse is ready to stick us or to be surprised? Which is your preference and why?
2. Most of us dislike uncertainty. We want to know what’s going to happen in advance, so we can set our expectations. When it comes to spiritual life, many people have the expectation that people of faith are entitled to special privileges, like being protected from all harm. Then when things don’t go according to plan and expectations are upended, our faith is challenged. What do you think: As followers of Jesus, are we entitled to special privileges not available to others? Do we have the right to expect God to protect us from harm?
3. On Sunday, Jeff suggested that Psalm 23 has become the most famous chapter in the Bible because it manages to capture life in all its subtlety and complexity – and thus helps us set realistic expectations for a life of faith. Psalm 23 can be divided into two distinct parts, split right down the middle – verses 1-3 (the sunny side of life) and verses 4-6 (the dark side of life). Let’s explore both parts. First, read Psalm 23:1-3.
  - a. Note the reference to “green pastures” and “still waters” that restore our soul. The promise here is that our Good Shepherd recognizes that we need times of renewal and makes sure we each get our fair share of good times and beautiful moments. Do you feel like you’ve gotten your fair share of “green pasture” and “still water” moments in life? Why or why not?
  - b. Most of our lives are filled with “green pasture” moments large and small. Jeff gave the example of a memorable back scratch when he was a kid. Give us an example of a “green pasture” moment from your own personal experience.
  - c. Why is it so important that we recognize, celebrate, and give thanks for our “green pasture” moments?
4. After reminding us of the sunny side of life, Psalm 23 takes a sudden dark turn. After talking about “green pastures” and “still waters,” the second half of the psalm speaks of being surrounded by enemies and of walking through “the valley of the shadow of death.” Read Psalm 23:4-6.
  - a. Note the vivid word image offered in verse 5, “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.” If you were an artist painting a scene depicting verse 5, what would you paint?
  - b. On p. 3, see an example of one artist’s rendering of verse 5. As you project yourself into the picture, where are you in it and what feelings does it evoke?
  - c. After showing us the picture on p. 3, Jeff said, “This is your life.” What do you think he meant? Do you agree?

- d. What enemy (or enemies) surround you in your life right now?
5. Based on what we see in Psalm 23, the promise of the Scriptures is not that people of faith experience only green pastures. We face as much trouble as everybody else. The difference, the Scriptures promise, is that it's possible for people of faith to feast in the midst of chaos – kind of like the woman in that E\*Trade commercial on TV where her workplace is in chaos, but she remains serene. How is it possible to be that way? David tells us in the opening line of Psalm 23, again in the last line, and once more in the middle:

Verse 1. “The Lord is my shepherd.” What does that mean?

Verse 6. “I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” What does that mean?

Verse 4. “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for you are with me.” What does that mean?

6. Jeff said, “According to Psalm 23, there is only one constant – in both good times and bad. Only one immutable promise. Only one thing that a person of faith can always count on. You . . . will . . . never . . . be . . . alone! There is a Presence – a divine presence – that’s always there with you, ready to comfort, equip, and strengthen you for whatever you face.” As a result, we’re able to experience great beauty even in times of great distress. “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.”
- a. Tell us about a time in your life when you found yourself sitting at God’s banquet table unperturbed, still blessed, still basking in the beauty of life amidst great trouble in life. Suppose someone asked you, “How can you be so at-peace amidst so much trouble?” How would you explain it?
- b. Jeff compared life to the classic Simon & Garfunkel song “Scarborough Fair” that weaves two different melodies telling two discordant stories (of love and war) in the same song. The result is a complex, confusing, beautiful, haunting song. Take a look at the lyrics from one of the verses of the song on p. 3. In what way is a life of faith like this song?
7. Jeff suggested three steps to experiencing the fullness of the gift of God’s presence in our lives:

**Step 1: Inviting** . . . God into my life and into each day.

**Step 2: Tuning in** . . . to God’s presence through spiritual practices like prayer, Scripture meditation, church, and worship music.

**Step 3: Expecting** . . . to experience God’s presence.

Which one of these steps most intrigues or challenges you?



## **Excerpt from Scarborough Fair**

By Simon & Garfunkel

(The blue lines are from the love story; the red lines from the war story.)

**Tell her to reap it with a sickle of leather**  
**War bellows blazing in scarlet battalions**  
**Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme**  
**Generals order their soldiers to kill**  
**And gather it all in a bunch of heather**  
**And to fight for a cause they've long ago forgotten**  
**Then she'll be a true love of mine**