

The Hidden Depths of Belonging

A Reflection on Psalm 23 During The Coronavirus Crisis

by the Rev Zac Koons

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Well it has been a disorienting few days. And I don't know about you but green pastures and still waters seem a long ways off from wherever we are right now. I actually am not sure where we are right now. And perhaps it is precisely that that explains why this bizarre stillness we're living in, even though it is still, does not feel peaceful. Even though many of us have been, over the past few days, literally spending more time outside walking—some of us maybe even literally in green pastures—there is something in the air that keeps even those activities from feeling completely restorative to one's soul. On the other hand, it does not feel quite right to say that we are in the valley of the shadow of death. But it does feel like the shadow is already encroaching on our territory and that our entering the valley is inevitable.

We don't know exactly what's coming. We don't know exactly how long or how many or how soon or how dark. And that is hard. We don't know when we'll be able to hug again. Or go to school or work again. Or find 2-ply toilet paper again. So I wanted to remind us this morning of one thing we do know for sure.

It's that we will be together. Of course, not in the ways we're accustomed to, but one thing I can promise you, is that no one needs to walk through this valley alone. As I've said several times already in the past few days, just because we can't gather physically in the same place for this season does not mean that we cease to be the body of Christ. It does not mean that we cease to be a community of transformational belonging. It only means that this is a time for us to creatively explore the unplumbed depths of words like togetherness and belonging.

As a matter of fact, this is already happening. In some ways our community has practiced transformational belonging this week in more powerful and beautiful ways than I have seen before.

This week alone I've seen tons of you make grocery runs for vulnerable people you've never met, including someone who has been attending this church for 2 months picking up medicine for food for someone who has been attending for 20 years. Another one of you, a student forced to come home from college called and said put me on errand-duty immediately. One of our small groups had dinner together last night over a Zoom call because they just couldn't stand another week apart. Parents are jumping in to help out with childcare for the health care workers in our community.

Our Shower Ministry group called the Trinity Center to ask what they needed most right now and a day later had packed up 40 individually wrapped and sanitized emergency hygiene packs for our homeless neighbors downtown. One of you waited in line at BestBuy curbside pickup for 2 hours so we could get a \$15 cord we thought we needed but aren't even using right now because we're still figuring out how to livestream this moment to you. Another one of you pulled over to the side of the road in West Texas to set up a wifi hotspot so you could help our stupid Rector figure out how to send an email out to the whole congregation. I've seen you give money without asking—even beyond your pledge. I've seen you step into vulnerable spaces—like in front

of a video camera—to share your heart like never before. Or share your talent. Or your jokes. I've seen you up here cleaning the meditation trail because you know it's a needed source of hope and joy for our neighbors now more than ever. I've seen you creatively transforming your homes into workshops of beauty and wonder for your kids.

And that's all just in one week. And we're not done exploring the hidden depths of our belonging yet. Our lunch next week with Community First Village was canceled. What did our group decide? Not only are we going to send the \$1,000 check we were planning on bringing with us anyway, we are going to give even more. In this moment of significant economic uncertainty, St. Mark's is going to give more generously than we ever have before. El Buen Samaritano, our local Episcopal food pantry has gone from serving 20 families with groceries per day to 260. We are going to write them a check too. As HEB is sorting our creative solutions to get groceries to our seniors, in addition to continuing grocery runs ourselves, we are now thinking through creative ways to care for our grocery store workers. We're going to see if it's possible for our knitting group to start knitting masks for hospital workers. We are creating a phone tree to help keep our lonely hearts connected. And we're passing the peace in creative new ways through our #PassThePeaceProject.

When this whole thing is over, we will surely and rightly say that we hope we never have to go through something like this again. But I believe we will also say that we're amazed by the things we discovered about ourselves and our community in the valley. I believe this is a moment where the world is looking at the church interested to see whether being a Christian truly makes a difference this or not. And one week in I'm already bowled over by the beauty of the body of this Christ. I believe we will look back and see that we spent this time not only exploring the hidden depths of words like togetherness and belonging. I believe we will look back and realize we what we were actually doing was exploring the hidden depths of God. We will look back and see that God did not abandon us to the valley. Because that is what God promises. "I fear no evil, for you are with me." Our creative endeavors into the depths of belonging communicates precisely this to those in our community *and* those outside it: God loves you. You are not alone.

So as we look ahead to an uncertain future. As the shadow encroaches and the valley looms. Let me encourage you: Lean in to this belonging more than you ever have before. You don't have to be alone. We still are what we need most: the body of Christ.

Amen.