

Sermon November 21 2021 Jyrekis Collins

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 23:1-6

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even 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 overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

SERMON: "How to keep from losing your head" Minister Jyrekis Collins

I want to talk today about how to keep from going crazy. How to keep from losing your head. This text, Psalm 23, is traditionally a funeral text. However, I've discovered that this journey of life lately has been one filled with much sorrow.

This morning as I tried to get myself up to have breakfast with Terry and Jay Wise – which I did, and it was wonderful – but while I was getting ready, I saw on the news a reminder of who I am in America as a Black man. I was reminded that Kyle Rittenhouse was not convicted. I was reminded that Ahmaud Arbery's case is still going on in Georgia. And while, at 7:30 this morning, trying to prepare for worship, while I was trying to prepare to speak to the people of God here in this vineyard, I was reminded of why we need encouragement on how to not lose our head.

There is so much, beloved, that can take us, there is so much that can discourage us and misguide us. And it was this text that I continued to go back to when I found myself being lost within the waves of this topsy turvy experience called life.

I was thinking about King David. David says *The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want*. You have to first understand the way you're going to keep it all together in the best way that you can. You have to understand where your help comes from. Some of you can testify that if this pandemic has taught you anything, it's taught you that you can't depend on your good-paying job because you might be laid off from that. Some of you can testify that you can't depend on your great health and your clean eating and your workout regimen, because Covid does not care about all of those things sometimes. We all exist in this corridor now of understanding, that we have to understand where our help comes from. Our help – we don't look to the east or the west – but we depend on the Lord. We don't trust in chariots or horses or the President or the Senate. But we trust in the name of the Lord. We try to put them in office so that we can trust them, but we trust in the name of the Lord. And so David says you've got to know where your help comes from. *The Lord is my shepherd*. When David says that, David is not unsure who is in control. David says *The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want*.

One of the things that helps me to understand that God is in control is that whenever I fly, then God has to be in control! I took a flight a few weeks ago, and I'm taking a flight Tuesday (y'all

pray for me!). I was flying out of Hartford, Connecticut to Georgia. And I tell you, the plane was shaking so bad, it was turbulence I had never experienced before in my life. I looked at my neighbor and my neighbor looked at me, and I said well, are you praying? Should I pray? We heard the pilot come over the intercom saying remain calm, we have everything under control. Well obviously, it didn't feel like anything was under control. Everything felt like it was about to fall out the bottom. I was going to jump out of the plane before the plane dropped! But that's oftentimes how our lives go and God has to remind us. Scripture teaches us and tells us that God has it under control.

Thinking about Covid-19 and how it has ravaged our communities. And still dealing with old systems and structures that we've been dealing with called racism since this country's inception. It's a lot going on. Lord, do you really have it under control? God has it under control. David in this text teaches me that God has it under control.

But another thing that this text teaches me, that encourages me, is that God is faithful. The Bible says here the Lord will prepare a table before us. A table to feast. That's why you ought not to be mad at people who don't like you, because the more people that don't like you, the more food God will prepare on your table. *(smile)* Amen! I'm not the only one who's prayed that prayer, Lord, let my enemies see me eat well! And so it says the Lord will *prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies, and anoint my head with oil, and my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life.*

The background of what David is saying, David talks about God chasing him because David has run from God before. If you know anything about David, David is merely human. David ran from God when he abused Bathsheba. David ran from God when David forgot who God was in David's life. And so often, sometimes our confusion, sometimes our lack of awareness, sometimes our lack of understanding comes because we block our own paths. But God is faithful. That's why I'm glad a lot of folks are not God, because if it was up to some people, we would not have second chances, and third chances, and fourth chances, and fifth chances.

But David says surely, without a shadow of a doubt, the goodness of God will chase me, even when I'm running from God. Surely. Without a shadow of a doubt. *Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

Beloved, I want to tell you the way you're going to not go crazy, the way you're not going to lose your head during this time. You have to understand that God is in control, and that God is faithful, and you have to surrender your will to God's. If this time will teach you anything, it will teach you how to surrender your will to God. We're approaching Thanksgiving, and I know many people said why doesn't the preacher preach a Thanksgiving message? The truth of the matter is that a lot of people, a lot of us here, are struggling. We're struggling, trying not to lose our minds while in worship. But God accepts our honesty. God accepts us the way we are. Coming to God, God's altar, the way we are. God accepts us in our honesty because the Lord is our shepherd.

In closing, I want to tell you a story of this boy from Georgia. This boy was climbing a mountain. While he was climbing this mountain away from home, his mother sent with him a

bag full of supplies. He's climbing and climbing this mountain. He didn't check the bag before he left, but he knew that his mother had prepared something in the bag. While he's climbing this mountain, the bag falls open. The bag falls open behind him. He's still trying to climb the mountain. What I didn't tell you was that the boy's bag was not just full of ordinary supplies. But this boy's bag was filled with words. He's climbing the mountain, and the bag falls open, and words go everywhere. He's climbing, but he has to reach back and grab his words. I think about this story of this boy because while he's climbing he has to grab words. His mother put these words in his bag, and while he was climbing he had to encourage himself and grab a word to say: *The Lord is my shepherd*. Oh, that wasn't enough, because he still had more mountain to climb, and so he had to reach back and grab some more words: *He restores my soul. God leads me in the paths of righteousness for God's name's sake. My cup runneth over.*

So I want to admonish you on the way you won't lose your head is that you've got to pack the right bag. When you go into work, you have to pack your bag with the right stuff that will keep you sane. When you mentor, when you do, when you create, when you dare to imagine the possibilities, you have to remember that you have to have a bag that is prepared and that is ready to handle the throes that life will give you.

I want to tell you, there's a way to keep from losing your head. You have to understand that God is in control, and that God is faithful. And don't forget that while you're climbing these mountains on life's journey, some of you will deal with depression this Thanksgiving that is unimaginable. Some folks we thought would be here with us are not here with us today. I want you to remember the bag while you climb, and reach back for the words that will keep you from losing your head.

Let the church say Amen.

*Our guest preacher: Jyrekis B. Collins is a native of Athens, Georgia and is a graduate of Clarke Central High School. He is a minister of the gospel, on fire for Jesus Christ. Jyrekis has an earned Bachelor of Arts degree from the prestigious Morehouse College in Atlanta where he studied Religion. Jyrekis is currently a Master of Divinity candidate at Yale University Divinity School in New Haven, CT. At Yale he has served as the Yale Black Seminars historian, Vice President and is currently the acting president. He also is the music and arts coordinator for the Andover Newton Seminary at Yale Divinity School. Jyrekis has also worked as a special research assistant to Dr. Donyelle McCray, associate professor of homiletics at Yale. Jyrekis is interested in homiletics, telling the narratives of black preachers - working to ensure that the oral and written histories of black preachers are preserved. Jyrekis is committed to lifelong learning and plans to pursue a doctoral degree. Jyrekis is a lover of local coffee, and in his free time enjoys reading and spending quality time with friends and loved ones!*