



WEEKLY STUDY June 18-24, 2021

(Use this guide to individually or with a group dive deeper into this week's sermon.)

My Story My Song – Week One.

For the past few years, for two weeks in the summer we hear from two of our church members. They witness through word and through their favorite hymn to how God has been present in their life.

Our scripture this week is Psalm 23

“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 right paths for his name's sake.
Even though I walk through the darkest Valle, I ear 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 my whole life long.” (NRSV)

- 1) Psalm 23 is among the most familiar passages from the Bible. Thinking back to my childhood, I know it was one of the first passages I was required to memorize (using the King James Version of the Bible). And with all the translations we now have available to us, most people still know it best from the King James Version. While we may no longer speak with “thees’ and ‘thous’, to some the only way this psalm feels right is with the old language. Our speaker this week, Brij Prasad, cited this as his favorite scripture. And I’m sure he isn’t the only one in our congregation who considers it a favorite.

Question: Do you remember when you first heard or read or memorized Psalm 23? What meanings does it hold for you? Is it among your favorites? Why?

- 2) We were privileged to hear Brij Prasad's story and song as our first speaker for our annual 2-Sunday theme, "My Story. My Song." Brij's life story is in many ways different from that of most of us. Growing up in India in a Christian family, he said several times how important it was to have our own faith and allow others to have their faith. He told us in his own family there were members who are Christian; those who are Muslim; those who are Hindu; and those who are Sikh. (And I may have missed others.) His exposure to those of other faiths has been a constant through his life. It made me think of my own life – growing up in a small town in Arkansas – where everyone (to my knowledge) was some flavor of Christianity. And as a Methodist (this was prior to the 1968 merger with EUB's that created the United Methodist Church), I was often questioned and had classmates trying to convert me to their brand of Christianity (in particular picking on me because we have infant baptism). As I heard Brij speak, I wondered how well we are in living our own faith and allowing others to live their faith without censure.

Question: What has been your experience with those of other faiths? How well do you think we in our country do in living our own faith and allowing others to live their faith if it is different from ours?

- 3) Brij told us of learning (and singing) the song "Blessed Assurance" as early as third grade. "Blessed Assurance" was written by Fanny Crosby who, over the course of her life, wrote more than 8000 hymns using more than 200 pen names. Being blind, she would write the entire song in her head and then dictate to a friend or secretary. Her friend, Phoebe Palmer Knapp, came to her with a tune that she had composed and played it to Crosby, saying, "What does this tune say?" Crosby replied, "Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!" I am always grateful for the chorus of this hymn, "This is my story; this is my song. Praising my savior all the day long." Some days it's hard for me to hold on to an attitude of praise. Other days, it feels as natural as breathing. But every time I hear this hymn, the chorus reminds me of the importance of praise, and thanksgiving, and gratitude.

Question: Was this a hymn you were familiar with? What words from the hymn are ones you feel you need to hold on to? What would you state as the "blessed assurance" of your faith?

- 4) This week, for the first time, we celebrate Juneteenth as a national holiday. There were those who questioned why this should become a national holiday, arguing that there are too many official holidays where people have a day off from work. (Perhaps this is a hangover from our Puritan work ethic?) Juneteenth commemorates when the message finally arrived to those enslaved in Texas that they were free. The time of humans legally binding other humans into slavery in the U.S. finally had come to an end. Sadly, we continue to bind one another in ways that are harmful and contrary to God's creation. But on this day, these words from the hymn, "Lift Every Voice and Sing" are ones that can be a good guide for us: "Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us; sing a song, full of the hope that the present has brought us". We have to tell the stories of both dark and light. And we have a charge to live with hope because of our faith.

5) Question: On this Juneteenth, what do you think we need to remember? What stories need to be told? What actions need to be taken?

Prayer: O God – creator of all and lover of all – you have created each of us with story and with song. On those days when we feel lost and alone, remind us that the story of our life is enveloped in your story. In those times when the melody of our soul is dim, reawaken all of our senses to the music that surrounds us. In the small moment of our lives, help us embrace joy. And in all ways, help us remember the story and songs are not for us alone but for all of your creation. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

Weekly Challenge: At the end of each day this week, ask yourself: “What story did my words and actions tell others today of my faith in a God whose name is love?”

(Weekly study guide prepared by Rev. MaryJane Pierce Norton)