

Rev. Dr. Anne Bain Epling  
First Presbyterian Church  
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Psalm 23

*Merciful God, who is more than we can ever imagine, give us a wider vision of the world; give us a broader view of justice; give us dreams of peace that are not defined by boundaries of geography or race or religion, or by the limitations of worldly structures and systems.*

*Open our eyes and our ears that wherever we go, we may hear your voice calling us by name; calling us to serve, calling us to share, calling us to praise, so that we never give up on the promise of your kingdom, where the world is transformed, and all can enjoy life in all its fullness. Amen.*

### **“Our Cups Overflow”**

Every day, day in and day out, you and I are exposed to 4,000-10,000 ads per day. That's nearly double the number of ads the average person saw in 2007 and over five times as many ads as the average person saw in the 1970s. ads are on social media, television, radio or streaming services, podcasts, our computers, the pages of the newspaper, on the sides of buses, in the pages of magazines, in the form of an e-mail, at the movie theater during the previews, at the mall in shop windows, at the TinCaps stadium, in the programs and playbills for concerts and shows, and just about everywhere. 4000-10,000 times a day a message comes to us that we do not have enough; that we need this product or gadget; that we should spend more to be happier and live more fulfilled lives. 4000-10,000 times a day.

So what is the issue here? The issue is that you and I are here this morning in the name of the One who fills our cups until they overflow and gives us everything we need and came so that we might have abundant life. This does not mean that God will fill our lives with an endless supply of stuff, but God will give our lives purpose, meaning and fulfillment . . .without the necessity of the latest gadget or whatever it is the influencer is peddling today.

So this morning you get a sermon about money; because there are many, many needs in our community and world, And I believe with a change of thinking and reordering priorities, some of us can do more good with what we have because truly our cups overflow.

Psalm 23 is, perhaps, the most familiar passage in the Bible. It's like the Mona Lisa of the Bible. Everyone knows it. It is probably one of the few Bible passages a person can quote from memory, especially the King James Version:

*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not.  
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures and leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

In just six short verses, the Psalm conveys an image of tranquility and peace. It's a psalm of trust that we can recite when things are going wrong because it affirms that we can call on God and God will be there for us. It gives us the image of a shepherd who leads us through difficult times.

Why, Psalm 23 is practically an American institution. On the one hand, commenting on it seems superfluous. But on the other hand, its very familiarity invites us to hear it in a new and fresh way. So listen to this translation:

*God, my shepherd! I don't need a thing. You have bedded me down in lush meadows, you find me quiet pools to drink from. True to your word, you let me catch my breath and send me in the right direction. Even when the way goes through Death Valley, I'm not afraid when you walk at my side. Your trusty shepherd's crook makes me feel secure. You serve me a six course dinner right in front of my enemies. You revive my drooping head; my cup*

*brims with blessing. Your beauty and love chase after me every day of my life. I'm back home in the house of God for the rest of my life.*

God serves us a six course dinner? Our cups overflow? Tell that to the advertisers. 4,000-10,000 times a day we are told our cups are empty and we need more to be fulfilled.

So was the writer of the psalm hopelessly naïve? No, not at all. The writer of Psalm 23 and its original listeners faced the same stresses we do. The citizens of 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine were distracted and harried, too. The Jewish peasants who heard this Psalm attempted to live, much like we do, with peace, abundance and faithfulness while paying taxes, working hard, and providing for a family. They encountered stress; they worried they didn't have enough money; they searched for meaning in their lives; and they worked ever-increasing hours in a sputtering economy.

If we're honest, we'll confess that the economy of this psalm runs completely counter-cultural to the prevailing economy that promises us wholeness and satisfaction if we would just buy a certain gadget or good. The economy of the psalm challenges us to rethink that and instead to hear that the only necessity for life is God because only God can fill our lives with purpose, meaning and fulfillment. This is what Psalm 23 affirms, despite what the advertisers want to tell us.

A few years, the PBS documentary show "Frontline" ran a series titled "The Persuaders" that looked at how the advertising industry has changed through the years. The series explored how the cultures of marketing and advertising have come to influence not only what we buy, but also how we view ourselves and the world around us. A social media has only further impacted this. This approach to advertising, called "emotional branding", does not emphasize what the product does but what it means. One of the advertisers interviewed for Frontline said that an advertisement used to promise that the product would provide a real, tangible difference using, what he called, the "er" words: for example, a product would give a whiter, brighter, cleaner, stronger result than another product. But over time this type of advertisement ceased to have meaning. As he said, all French fries

tasted good and all coffee was hot. So advertising leapt from what the product did to what it meant.

Now, instead of providing a good cup of coffee, Starbucks gives us a community. Now, instead of providing a good pair of running shoes, Nike instills in us the belief that we can do anything. “Just do it,” the ads claim. The United Colors of Benneton (remember them), didn’t sell us clothes, they sold us diversity. A former marketing director of Proctor and Gamble said in the piece that it used to be his job to provide good copy and slick packaging. Now, he says, a product manager (and I quote), “must create a meaning system through which a person gains an identity and an understanding of the world.” Sounds an awful lot like religion to me.

The same P and G exec said he had a eureka moment while watching 8 people rhapsodize about a sneaker. “Where are they coming from,” he wondered. “This is a piece of footwear. And the terms they were using to describe the sneaker were evangelical.” So why not give them what they want? Which, he says, is a need to belong, to find meaning, and to be in the company of others. Indeed, emotional branding, the person said, seeks to fill the empty places that civic institutions like schools and churches used to fill. But, the exec said, while the products being sold may be useful, they can’t provide the abundant life and purpose that we seek.

The things we buy cannot provide the abundant life we seek and want. Only God can do that. Only God can fill that empty space.

A provocative Old Testament scholar challenged a group of people saying, “I’m not really interested in your story of faith. I want to know about your story with money.” And another has said, “Show me your checkbook, and I will tell you what you believe.” Perhaps this is why Jesus liked to talk about money more than anything else.

This week, I challenge you to go through however it is you track your spending and write down where you’ve spent your money in the past month. And then I want you to ask yourself, “What does this say about what I believe?” The next time you pull out your credit card or phone, or your checkbook if you still use one, ask yourself, “What does this say about

what I believe? Am I using my God given resources wisely, or could I really do something else with this money?" You see, I believe that with a change of thinking and reordering priorities, many of us, can do more good with what we have because truly our cups overflow.

I have said it before but I will say it again, especially since we're not in stewardship season: that stewardship is a way of life. It's acknowledging the theological idea that God is the owner of all, and because of that, we're not deciding how much we'll give, we're deciding how much we'll keep. In this way we're not really givers, we're really receivers: receivers of God's love and grace, receivers of the abundant life God promises us; and receivers whose cups are overflowing . . . who are simply giving back to God and the world God loves, what was already God's to begin with.

4,000-10,000 messages a day. Every day, we're faced with choices about how to spend our money, there's just no way around it. The choices will always be there. So we need to manage those choices: is this a need or a want? Is this something I can live without? If I have \$100 or \$20 of walking-around-money in my pocket, how am I going to spend it? Stewardship doesn't force you to scrape by. What stewardship asks you to do is to make a better informed decision about where your money goes so that you have money to give back to God-and ultimately, so that you have more to give to God than just the leftovers.

Ultimately, all of us need to ask ourselves if the choices we make about money are putting God at the periphery of our lives, or at the center of our lives? God deserves more than our leftovers; God deserves our all. Because just like the Psalmist proclaims: *God, my shepherd! I don't need a thing.*

Amen.