

The Fallow Way

“Comfort In The Challenge”

Psalm 90:1-2, 14-17; 1 Thessalonians 2:5-8;

Romans 12:1a, 2

November 22, 2020

Theme:

As fall fades and the cusp of winter is near, we now enter a fallow time...in mother nature and, thank you Lord, in our human nature as well.

In nature, the fields lay fallow. Seeds freeze to be cracked open by the seeming cold...making germination possible. Fields go unplanted, covered by the snow. That snow contains the very nitrogen the soil needs for new life to grow. And so the plant roots actively continue to grow, imbibe the richness of the soil...

made possible in fallowness.

And this bears fruit! Literally, in the right timing: spring.

The Fallow Way in our human nature is a time when God invites us to enter into God's ways of enriching ourselves with holy rest and holy restoration...taking in what we most need now...knowing this bears much fruit in our right timing, too...

a conscious time restoring and preparing us as internal seasons of winter and, so then, spring come.

Much that is life-giving goes on beneath this quieted surface. There is a difference between “not doing anything” and “doing no-thing”.

When we embrace the Fallow Way, there is precious work unfolding beneath the surface of things with real consequence.

Rumi says:

Don't think the garden loses its ecstasy in winter. It's quiet, but the roots are down there riotous.

The Fallow Way is a seemingly quiet, riotous way through our loss and grief, exhaustion or exhilaration.

A Holy rest within God's tender care that restores.

So let me ask you:

What is it in your life that so longs for rest? is most tired, weary?

What within you longs to be restored?

Lean into the mystery. Trust. Your roots grow deep.

Lean into the Fallow Way.

At first I couldn't see a connection between these scriptures and our theme. Then I realized the difference between being fallow and hiding...hiding out beneath the surface of things to avoid things. The challenge is to bring some fallow time with us into all the challenging times of our lives. Can we bring the depth and restoration of the fallow way with us through our winter or frozen moments into a spring of possibility? For the point is not the empty fields, it's the fullness of what is brought to life in the “soul” beneath them...and the harvest it yields.

Prompting:

The comfort of Ezekiel. The challenge of Matthew.

Of Comfort:

Even as the world scatters us, our God rescues us and feeds us.

The Shepherd makes His sheep to lie down and receive rest and comfort and protection.

God seeks the lost, brings us back when we stray, binds up what's injured, strengthens us, feeds us in rich pastures... fallow ones.

Our Challenge:

Spring comes.

And those who grow fat will only be fed with justice...those who pushed with flank and shoulder and butted all the weak animals with their horns and scattered them.

In season, those will be fed with justice.

...those who focus on their own good; justifying their looking away, ignoring the people before them who are covered with sores, imprisoned, the hungry and thirsty, the children...ignored.

In the right timing, fed only with justice, those so misguided who think, certainly, God loves them more or they have earned favor.

Yes, Comfort and Challenge.

Are we those comforted or those challenged?
(Lean sheep or Fat sheep/ sheep or goad?)

Hmmnnn...well first off maybe we consider this:

Do we see God/Jesus in each person we meet?

And you know what I wonder...

if it is sometimes easier to see Jesus in someone you don't know,
in the stranger...as hard as that can be,

than it is to see Jesus in the people we know and see every day.

Is it easier to see Jesus in someone if you're feeling sorry for them, if it's someone who is down and out, troubled and with lots of issues?

...easier than it is to see Jesus in the people you live with each day?

Do we really see those close at hand at all in the daily hubbub?

Sometimes we have to look long and hard before we can even catch a real glimpse of the people we know best...of the Christ within that someone we know well who annoys us or we're mad at or about whom we make assumptions, can easily ignore and judge.

In no way is this meant to diminish the impact of Jesus' teachings about “the least of these.”

**Rather it points to the fact that
we can't avoid the teaching even if we can avoid
the obviously poor and sick.**

And when we find ourselves in hard circumstances,
we often don't see the Jesus in or around us.

We so often lament:

Where are You? Where is Jesus now? Where is God?

This is the question often asked...when the bridge falls, the gun is shot, the kitchen cabinet empty, the cancer back...

in the face of this, where is God?

But better asked might be: Where are we?

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Until the time God came to walk with us as Jesus, God had been understood to reside in the Temple's “Holy of Holies”.....behind the curtain...the one that is torn at Jesus death.

Jesus turns this understanding inside out and fully reveals God cannot be confined to one place or time or peoples.

He says...instead of the temple...and palaces and high places,
God resides...in the company of a ragged group of scrappy looking fellows called disciples, in the gutsy women with devoted hearts who are also the disciples, those left out or without...

in people covered with sores, and those imprisoned, the hungry and thirsty, the children.....God is known in the faces of the poor.

It is within these folk where the realm of God
is demonstrated most clearly. Within you.

Not because they/you are weak.

Not because they/you need pity.

But because they and we know deeply,

despite what appears hopeless,

God is present and God isn't done with them...us.

Hope springs eternal.

Fall back into the everlasting arms of God...

have faith. Actually, it is all and it is everything.

It is the way through. Truly, it's all we ever have.

But even if others have faith in what is yet to be,
that doesn't get us off the hook.

We are to do unto others as we would have them do unto us.

And amazingly, you know this is true! ...in interacting with them, **it is not only that we help them, they help us...**

**stay in the fold known...deeply belonging,
seeing ourselves more clearly,
leaning into those everlasting arms
for we *all* need
those arms!**

Yes, we are called as new human beings to do "right" by the poor and challenged and imprisoned. And the system that holds them in place despite their best efforts. Now, that's uncomfortable!

And, preciously, in coming alongside such as these,
you have an opportunity to get in touch with that sore spot in you ...that part of you that is trapped, imprisoned,
the hunger in you, the naked vulnerability you feel,
your thirst for things to be different.

You realize we are all much more alike than we are different.

And, more than 1 to 1 encounters or programs that serve immediate needs,
it's about addressing the systemic that perpetuates current condition rather than meets underlying needs. Ouch!

Like our Presbytery eliminating \$1.5 million medical debt,
working within (not leading) and financially supporting
minority led efforts and businesses addressing community needs.

The story clearly lets us know that what we do matters.

And, it's not too late for us...

to embody loving kindness, accept grace, take that do-over!

Friends, we all have sheep moments and goat moments.

(Lean sheep moments/Fat sheep moments.)

That's good news!

Our God knows we are not one or the other. We are each, both.

And, there are *times* we're more sheep than goat!

Bad news!

You can't blame any shepherd, family, boss, society, life partner, president, political party or conspiracy theory for the goat in you!

Good news!

You can take some joy in the **sheep choices you've made so far** and use them to guide your next choices!

Go follow a moment and think about that!

**The good and bad of it is that what we do matters!
How we live matters!**

How shall we live? How shall you? How shall I?

Jesus says like this: as if God is in each person you meet ...because God is!

Through all the seasons of our life, we must continually ask,
“What choices am I making today—is this a choice that enhances the God’s Empire/Christ’s
Reign on earth, or diminishes it?”

Will I be a sheep or a goat today?

It is not so much God but we ourselves who are doing the
Sorting...by what we do and the company we keep.

Sounds like a lot of pressure.

Oh Thank God we worship Presbyterian
and get what GRACE is all about.

You see it's not that we can figure it out all the time and make good sheep choices all the time.

But we can open our hearts with self-awareness...receive grace and take the do-over in the
community and
with the people right in front of us.

Build sheep moments on top of your goat moments.
Accept your new insights and some grace.
And live in gratitude for the good already in your life.

**It’s both grace and gratitude, comfort and challenge.
Not one or the other.**

There comes a Comfort in engaging the Challenge.

Comfort nudges us to engage the challenge more deeply.
The way in is the way out and the way out is to go in again.

Only in facing the challenge can we find true comfort...
with ourselves.

Build on the good you do...build on the good others do.

Build yourself up and them too.

Can you appreciate the difference that would happen in your daily life if...before you act you take a fallow minute to **honor the good in yourself and the person in front of you, recognized the Christ in them and in yourself...**

instead focusing on the bad in others or yourself...
what's broken, the shortcomings?

It's all the difference in the world!

In this season of giving thanks, let comfort and challenge, gratitude and grace come together. Be fallow in that a moment...

Let someone know how their good sheep choices have touched your life. Write them a note?

And just maybe, write yourself an appreciation note, too!

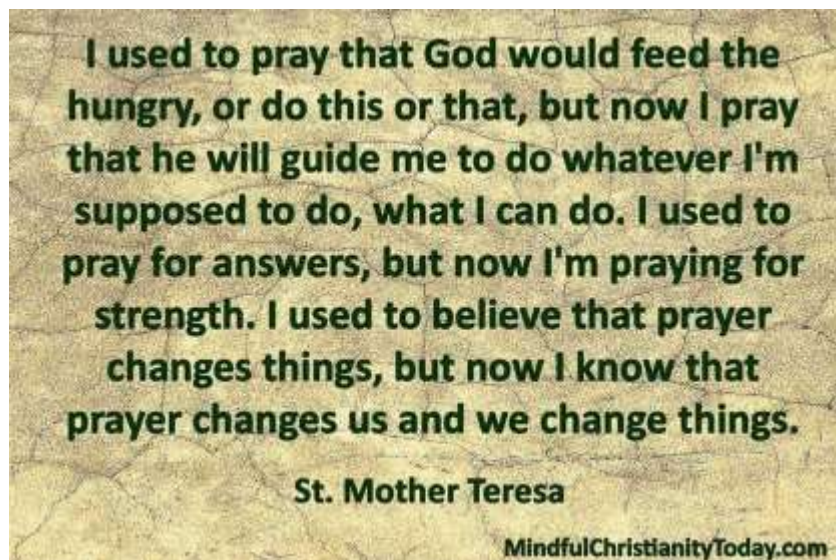
There is nothing shallow about fallow times.

Christ the King Sunday.....we have come full circle, been given wisdom...our worlds have been turned upside down by all Christ's teachings. We are about enter again into Advent.

But...we can.

We've walked from Bethlehem to Jerusalem and beyond with Jesus.

We know how the story ends and so we can begin again...
in grace, through gratitude, finding comfort in the challenge...
we are able live as new human beings.



Ah, the ecstasy of winter is hope springing eternal.

You have a newly rooted life.
Your roots intertwined with and sustained by our roots.

Take the rest of the fallow way with you...into Advent.
Here we go again, folks!