

In Search of Green Pastures and Still Waters
John 10:11-18
Psalm 23
25 April 2021
sermon by Rev. Jessica McCrae

I came across an interesting little short story awhile ago called “The Street that Got Mislaid” by Patrick Waddington. Set in Montreal it is a story about a man named Marc who worked in the city’s engineering department. He knew the city inside out, like the back of his hand. Every street, every alley, every winding lane. You could say he knew the city better than anyone in the entire city. Marc was a man whose life was ordered and organized, a man who kept his work place tidy and relied every day upon the all important files of index cards he kept neatly in place, recording every street and every person who lived on every street. Things were a bit monotonous if we’ve being honest. His index card system was a “triumph of bureaucracy”, Marc often said, and Marc loved bureaucracy.

So you can imagine his shock when, one day while opening one of his desk drawers wide open he came across an index card. A misplaced, unfiled index card. As he drew it out of his desk he saw a street name

totally unfamiliar to him, Green Bottle Street. The street had not been inspected for over 15 years. And it was then that the awful truth came upon him. “It was a lost forgotten street. For fifteen years and more it had existed in the heart of Montreal, not half a mile from city hall and no one had known. It had simply dropped out of sight, a stone in water.”

As the story progresses Marc finds himself on a mission to rediscover Green Bottle Street. He finds the street and begins a conversation with one of the inhabitants who says with some resignation, ‘So, you have found us at last.’ And she goes on to relate a tale of friendship among neighbours and a little oasis of peace apart from the bureaucracy and bustle of the world beyond calm and quiet Green Bottle Street. In a very real way these folks had created their own “still waters”. And after a wonderful conversation Marc the file clerk’s heart warmed to the woman he was talking to, warmed to the whole little lost street in fact, and with his mind made up Marc tore up the file card and decided that Green Bottle Street would remain mislaid forever.

I was drawn to this story because after the year we have just endured, I think we all could use a little oasis. The thought of a street that has been unscathed by the pain and the anxiety of this pandemic, that is safe and protected, it is a wonderful thing. It feels like a dream,

doesn't it? Creating our own green pastures, our own still waters, an oasis of sorts in the midst of the bustle of the world as it is, a place of sanctuary where everyone gets along and where the ways of the world give way to what is best for the people. We all, sometimes I think, dream that a place like Green Bottle Street exists, untouched by all that can negatively impact our communities, and break apart relationships. A place known for its compassion, its lack of fear, its flowers.

I was drawn to this story because it brought to life in a "here and now" kind of way, the images in the 23rd Psalm, about being led to green pastures and still waters. And in this world as it is, I don't know about you, but I yearn for those green pastures and still waters. This year we have seen people pulling together in ways we haven't in a long while. We have made decisions, for the most part, that serve to protect the vulnerable and keep each other safe. But it hasn't been easy, it hasn't been without some contention ... and it was necessitate because of the reality of and fear of this horrible virus. Unlike Green Bottle Street, we didn't pull together simply because we could, but because our very survival made it necessary. So the thought of a place untouched by some of the darkness that permeates our world is like a balm to soothe our hearts and give us a bit of respite from the world in which we live

and are called to work and witness. We'd all like to be led to still waters, have a place of sanctuary on Green Bottle Street, we'd all just a bit of time to exhale.

And that is where these scripture passages today come in. This is where our faith comes in. Our faith tells us that even in this, even amidst all of the chaos and fear and illness, even in the midst of the valleys of death and darkness, we are not alone. We have a God who is with us in the midst of it all. We have a God who is helping us to find still waters, guiding us and working to calm our soul and give us the strength we need to engage with our world, exactly as it is, and still find peace.

The story of Green Bottle Street is easy, because it creates a place, a familiar place, a street just like any street we might live on, only this one is filled with goodwill and joy, friendship and compassion. Green Bottle Street is written as a real tangible place, and we all wish there was such a place we could retreat to in our lives. But like the green pastures and still waters described in the psalm, Green Bottle Street points to something even better than that, not a physical or geographical place, not somewhere that exists only in one place and time, but our still waters and green pastures, our Green Bottle street represents that spiritual place deep within us where we connect in our

own personal way to God, the giver of peace and the giver of new life. It represents that space that we can carry around with us, throughout our life journey, wherever we are, whatever is happening, that can bring us calm and peace when we need it most, and can ground us and remind us of what is most important as the pressures of life overwhelm us.

This is what our faith provides us, this is what church helps us to find – peace and comfort for today - something for today, for the midst of life, not life after death. You see the 23rd Psalm and the images it invokes, the passage from John and the idea of Jesus as shepherd are not meant to convey an afterlife, as they are so often used. These passages illustrate a peace that can be found in the midst of the world as it is – just like how in the story Green Bottle Street exists amidst the frenetic pace of Montreal, these green pastures, these still waters, this shepherd exist for us here and now. In the midst of pandemic, in the midst of fear, in the midst of economic upheaval, even in the midst of the monotony of a ordinary Wednesday, this peace can exist for us here.

The teachings of Jesus, the lessons of our faith can bring us a peace, a knowledge that the valleys of the shadow of death will not go on forever, that the Spirit of love and justice is working in our world to bring light and welcome a new world. The lessons of our faith remind

us that death and fear do not have the final say, love overcomes hate, light overcomes darkness, and we are beloved.

We are beloved.

Beloved, forgiven and held in the loving embrace of God.

Still waters.

Green pastures.

This peace is ours. Given freely from the love of an immense and ever present God. This peace is ours. A reminder, a knowledge, a faith that we can cling to at any and every moment. A reminder that we can pull out in the middle of the night when worries assail us, a reminder that we can pull out while we are taking a walk through the village, when we are at work, in our car, in the kitchen ... when the pressures of life are building, or when we feel we've lost our way.

It is a reminder we can pull out when everything is quiet, and we find ourselves marveling at how small we are in such a very big universe.

This peace, this faith, this reminder that we are beloved, that we are not alone is our green pasture, our still water, our quiet street where we can regroup, rejuvenate, and refresh, so that we can engage with the world and find balance and hope in this precious life we have been

given. Take time to enter it, take time to enter into the promises of our faith, take time to engage with God, to pray, to reconnect, allow yourself to be led to some still waters.

You are beloved.

You are forgiven.

You are not alone.

May you know the peace of God's love and hope in the midst of your everyday, may you be led to green pastures and may you live with the hope of God's beloved child.

Amen.