

Through the Darkest Valleys

(Psalm 23:1-6)

Intro: "Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil."
-Psalm 23:4.

I haven't been here very long.
-I don't know all of you yet.
-I don't know everyone very well.

But I've been here long enough to know:
-Some of you have been through the valleys.
-Some of you may be in the valley right now.

I. There Is No Going Around The Valleys.

A. Vacation.

1. Last two years my wife and I have taken our vacation in the mountains.

a. Fall of 2004.

-We started in Colorado Springs.
#Taking the cog railway up Pike's Peak.
-Before heading southwest.
#Mesa Verde.
#Albuquerque.
*For the Balloon Fiesta.

b. Last June.

-We again started in Colorado Springs.
#Visiting some friends there.
-But then we headed north.
#Rocky Mountain National Park.
*In Colorado.
#Grand Teton National Park.
#Yellowstone National Park.
*In Wyoming.
#Glacier National Park.
*In Montana.
#Banff National Park.
#Jasper National Park.
*In Canada.
-We did a lot of driving.
#6700 miles in all.

2. If you've done any amount of driving through the mountains.
 - a. You know you can go:
 - From the valley to the mountaintop.
 - From the mountaintop to the valley.
 - From valley to valley.
 - b. What you can't do is go:
 - From mountaintop to mountaintop.
 - c. There is no avoiding the valleys.

B. Each of You Has Your Own Valley.

1. It's not always the "valley of the shadow of death."
 - a. It's the valley of deep shadows.
 - b. It's the valley of dark shadows.
 - Appropriate ways to translate Psalm 23:4.
2. Some of you have lost:
 - a. Spouse.
 - b. Child.
3. Some of you have been:
 - a. Separated.
 - b. Divorced.
4. Some of you may have:
 - a. Lost a job.
 - b. Failed a class.
 - Not been able to graduate with the rest of your classmates.
5. Some of you have had to deal with health problems.
 - a. Your own.
 - b. Those of a loved one.
6. Some of you may have asked:
 - a. Why?
 - b. Why me?
 - c. How long?
 - d. Where is God?

C. Let Me Tell You the Story of Thomas Dorsey.

1. Our Hymn of the Day for the 11:00 service.
 - a. "Precious Lord."
 - b. I picked it.
 - Not so much for it's own sake.
 - But because of the story behind the song.
2. Thomas Dorsey.
 - a. Was a composer.
 - Not Tommy Dorsey.
 - #He was another musician.

- b. Thomas A. Dorsey.
 - Choir master.
 - #At Pilgrim Baptist Church.
 - *In Chicago.
 - #For more than 40 years.
 - *1932-Late 1970s.
 - Pilgrim Baptist Church.
 - #One of the places that gave birth.
 - *To gospel music.
 - #Mahalia Jackson.
 - #Others.
 - *Sang at that church.
 - In 1932.
 - #Thomas Dorsey.
 - *Left his pregnant wife Nettie in Chicago.
 - *Drove to St. Louis.
 - +To sing at a revival.
 - *At the end of the service.
 - +Dorsey received a telegram.
 - =With tragic news.
 - +His wife had died in childbirth.
 - =Within hours.
 - Baby boy also died.
 - #Questions arose in his mind.
 - *Should he have stayed in Chicago?
 - *Had God done him an injustice?
 - Back in Chicago.
 - #Dorsey dealt with his grief.
 - *Sitting down at the piano.
 - *Composing "Precious Lord."
 - +WOV 731.
- 3. "Precious Lord, Take My Hand."
 - a. Precious Lord, take my hand.
 - Lead me on, let me stand,
 - I am tired, I am weak, I am worn.
 - Through the storm, through the night,
 - Lead me on to the light,
 - Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.
 - b. When my way grows drear,
 Precious Lord linger near,
 When my life is almost gone,
 Hear my cry, hear my call,
 Hold my hand lest I fall.
 Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.

- c. When the darkness appears
And the night draws near,
And the day is past and gone,
At the river I stand,
Guide my feet, hold my hand.
Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.
- 4. Thomas Dorsey was in the valley.
 - a. But he was not alone in the valley.

II. God Is In The Valley.

A. Valley Is Not God-Forsaken.

- 1. Like we might sometimes feel.
- 2. Jesus has been to the valley.
 - a. Actually, his valley was on a mountaintop.
-Golgotha.
 - b. His life.
-The world's hope.
#Extinguished by a cross.
 - c. His body buried in the shadows.
-In the darkness of a rock-hewn tomb.
-You can't get much darker than that.
- 3. But on the third day.
 - a. There was resurrection.
 - b. Light shown in the darkness.
 - c. Jesus headed back to the valleys.
-Our valleys.

B. God Is In Our Valleys.

- 1. To be with us.
 - a. Have you ever noticed how the references to God change?
-In Psalm 23.
 - b. In the first three verses.
-God is referred to in the 3rd person.
#The Lord is my shepherd.
#He makes me lie down in green pastures.
#He leads me beside quiet waters.
#He restores my soul.
#He guides me in the paths of righteousness.
 - c. But look what happens when we get to the valley.
-In verses 4-5.
-Now God is addressed directly in the 2nd person.
#You are with me.
#Your rod and your staff comfort me.
#You set a table before me.
#You anoint my head with oil.
-God is present with us in the valley.

2. To anoint our heads.
 - a. Anointing of sheep has two functions.
 - When there are flies.
 - #Oil.
 - #Spray.
 - *Helps to keep the flies away.
 - *Keeps the sheep from beating their brains out.
 - +Trying to get rid of the flies.
 - When there are sores.
 - #Oil.
 - #Sheep dip.
 - *Cleans a wound.
 - *Helps the scabs to heal.
 - *Keeps the sheep from:
 - +Rubbing their sores against:
 - =Trees.
 - =Rocks.
 - =Other sheep.
 - +Reopening their wounds.
 - +Running the risk.
 - =Infections being passed to other sheep.
 - b. God anoints us in baptism.
 - Washing our sinfully dirty wounds.
 - Sealing us with the Holy Spirit.
 - #There is water in the valley.
 - *Quiet water.
 - *Peaceful water.
 - *Restful water.
 - *Life-giving water.
 - God is with us in the valleys.
 - #To anoint our heads.
3. To set a table for us.
 - a. Other night.
 - Pam and I were invited out to dinner.
 - At the apartment of:
 - #My son.
 - #My daughter-in-law.
 - *He did the cooking.
 - *About 10 minutes before dinner was served.
 - +He asked her to set the table.
 - b. Setting the table.
 - Sign of hospitality.
 - Sign it's time to eat.

- c. God sets a table for us in the valley.
 - In the presence of our enemies.
 - Under the eyes of our enemies.
 - To the mortification of our enemies.
 - #In this day and age.
 - *There may be people:
 - +Who don't like us.
 - +Who hate us.
 - *There may be places.
 - +Where we are not welcome.
 - When God sets the table.
 - #You are welcome here.
 - #You are loved here.
 - #You are forgiven here.

Concl: At this table.

- Goodness and mercy.
- Goodness and loving kindness.
- Goodness and amazing grace.
 - #Follow us.
 - #Pursue us.
 - *Actually what the Hebrew word means.

How different from the way of the world!

- Where we often spend so much:
 - #Time.
 - #Effort.
 - #Energy.
 - *Pursuing:
 - +What we think is good.
 - +Love.
- Here at this table.
 - #God's goodness.
 - #God's love.
 - *Pursue us.
 - *Even in the valleys.
 - *Even in the darkest of valleys.