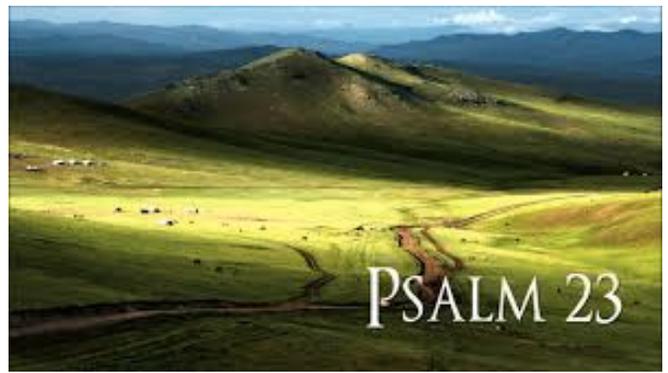


Let's Go Deeper...

Wednesday, June 8, 2016

Though I usually use the theme of the previous Sunday's sermon as the subject of going deeper, this week's reflections have emerged from the Sunday School Class. Jennie and I have been teaching with the children.



We've developed a curriculum that will teach the kids four of the key texts of the Bible: the 23rd Psalm, the Lord's Prayer, Paul's Love Chapter (1 Corinthians 13), and the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5). For the past four weeks, we have been teaching the 23rd Psalm.

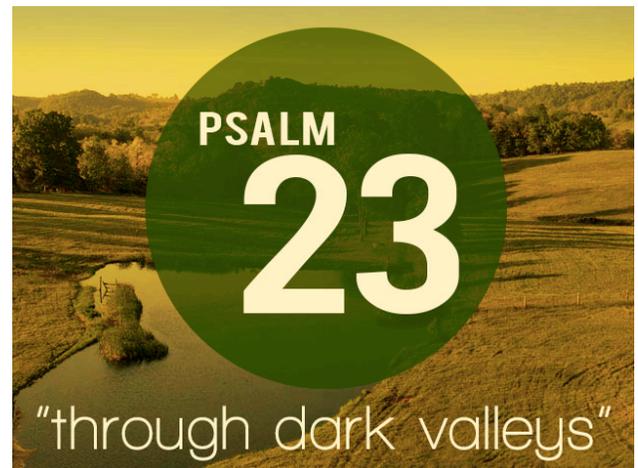
After an opening song ("I Just Want to Be a Sheep... *Baa Baa Baa Baa*") and ten minutes with me doing some "Rabbi Time" during which I'm helping them memorize the psalm by introducing them to some simple hand gestures to accompany the phrases, they are divided up into three sub-groups for focused learning time in one of three rooms.

Last Sunday, seven of the children went to the "Creation Station" workshop to do the art project related to our study of Psalm 23. Before beginning, they opened the Bibles on the table, turning to the middle of the Bible in search of the Psalms.

With a little help from teenage assistants, Sadie and Cole, everyone found Psalm 23 and then read it aloud together. A short discussion followed about what it means to say, "I shall not *want*" ...distinguishing between what we want and what we really need.

Everyone seemed to understand the part about lying down in **green pastures** and being **beside still waters** as something pleasant, but when the question was raised about what are the **dark valleys** ("the valley of the shadow of death") we go through, there was a definite pause.

To prompt their thinking, Jennie said something like, "Sometimes we have sad things that happen to us," to which Sydney Dryden responded, "Like my grandfather."



Knowing that Kris Dryden's stepfather had died the night before as a result of injuries sustained when he fell from a ladder, Jennie said, "Yes, like your grandfather."

Sydney then said, "He died," and Jennie said quietly, "Yes, he did."

Sydney's younger sister, Clara, was seated next to her and immediately looked up at Sydney and asked, "He died?"

Sydney simply said, "Yes, he died."

Clara asked again, "He died?" and Sydney said, "Yes."

Carter Bischoff, seated next to Jennie, spoke up as soon as Sydney finished, saying, "Oh, I get it! I understand what dark valleys are now. They are when something really bad happens and people are sad!"

Jennie said, "Yes, that's right, dark valleys are when bad things happen and people are sad and also when someone is afraid that something bad might happen and gets scared."

This Bible-based exchange led to the children's making pillows out of soft, green fleece. The pillows represent the comfort God gives and we can hold on to as we walk through life. Tying knots and stuffing the pillows took more time than anticipated, so the children were not able to do the closing activity, which was to take the finished pillows, lie down on the floor together, and have a time of quiet. However, without the children knowing this and before their time together ended, Jennie looked over at Reece Bowling who had finished his pillow. He had laid his head on it and appeared to be almost asleep, completely at peace.

The psalm had done its work. A child had connected her experience of grief with God's Word. She had gently reassured her little sister. Another child had the pleasure of an "I get it!" insight. The Bible came to life in his mind. Yet another laid his head down on the green pasture of a soft pillow, at peace in the House of the Lord.

We're mid-way through this year's Vacation Bible School as I write these words. Over 100 Central children, youth, and adults are sharing a meal in intergenerational family groups named after the founders of our movement and making their way through a series of classes (art, mission, crafts, music, and theater) as they learn about our 200 year history.

Sydney, Clara, Carter and Reece are all part of the learning, young disciples "growing in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and others" (Luke 2:52).

And I get to see it happening before my very eyes.

May God bless the children of Central, their parents who long for them to be rooted and grounded in the riches of the Christian faith, and those who give of themselves so freely and enthusiastically to be conduits of their learning.