

“Comfort & Courage”  
By Rev. Ridgley Joyner  
Ephesians 5:1-2, 8-14 & Psalm 23  
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On Ash Wednesday I embarked on the journey I knew would be challenging of giving up Amazon for lent. Little did I know just how challenging this would be. I’m happy to report that I have somehow not placed any orders on amazon this week.

It’s crazy to think about how minor “giving up amazon” for lent was for me now, a mere 3 weeks later...I find it ironic that this is the season of lent. That we are in the midst of our own wilderness that we didn’t ask for—this week we have been thwarted into new routines. Some of us have had to learn that dreaded technology, some of us are learning how to make do with food or meals they didn’t expect to have to eat (ask Will about our “shepherds pie” on Monday...), some of us have little ones at home and are suddenly teachers and parents at the same time—and some of us are employees on top of that. Some of us are feeling the pang of silence and an empty house. Some of us are left looking at ourselves and our purpose—I admit that I am actively fighting overfunctioning—a cross many caregivers bear.

It is easy to sit in the wilderness and wonder what if, what if, what if...I’m starting to understand how tempting the devil was to Jesus in the desert—there’s lots of unknowns in the wilderness. So in this Lenten wilderness the lectionary gives us a gift, a reminder, just like Jesus reminds us that one does not live on bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

Our two scripture passages this morning invite us to into Comfort and Courage.

### Comfort

Psalm 23 is a psalm of trust. It is often read at funerals and rightly so as it reminds us whose we are. We are God’s, God is our shepherd, providing for us, protecting us, restoring us. This week, we are invited to take comfort that even though we walk through this darkness- this wilderness—God will provide—it might look different in the ways we anticipated—but God will provide. To remember this ancient psalm that has provided comfort to countless souls—Psalm 23 reminds us that it is God who cares for us, who guides us...and who is WITH US in every step of this. God restores us—restores our weary souls. God is our light in the darkness and we are children of the light.

### Courage

Paul’s letter to Ephesus has a lot in it—but what we are going to look at today is a small part—where Paul reminds them, and us, that because we are children of the light—because we are sheep of God’s own fold, we are called to live as children of the light—our 3-4<sup>th</sup> grade Sunday school lesson is called “growing in grace and gratitude” and I love it because it starts us at Psalm 23—we are loved and known. We are God’s. But we don’t just sit at home and take comfort—we take that light and we live in it—we share it—we spread it—we illumine all that is good and right and true in the world. God is in the midst of this and God gives us the courage to live a life

that points to that Light in the Darkness. In the midst of our anxiety, stress, fear of the unknown, we can't forget each other.

I love that this past week has marked the earliest spring in 124 years. Suddenly we are given the gift of time to see the sunshine. To feel the warmth on our faces. To watch a tree bud and notice the birds singing god's praises. These are God's promises friends—While we are feeling cooped up, the world is giving birth to a new season filled with beauty and blessings. God's light is in abundance.

I know because I see it more than just outside.

It's funny. Usually in my research for my sermons or bible studies I inevitably come across somebody who has written an article about how social media has actually made people feel more distant, or provokes more discord, promotes fear, etc. and Let's be honest—Facebook hasn't exactly made the news for bringing people together lately. BUT I have been so humbled at the way social media and the internet have brought people together. Just this week, some folks in our youth group have been video messaging back and forth introducing us to our pets, our homes, our lives in a new way. Just this week, folks have been able to go to bible study groups they haven't been to for years because they moved away. Just this week, people have been able to be connected to folks they haven't connected with in a while.

My Yoga studio in Conshohocken is owned by two amazing women that I love dearly. I started going when I moved there last April and I literally go every day because it has kept me sane in my own wilderness of Chronic Illness. They decided on Thursday of last week to close their doors in care of their own community. They decided as leaders, to set an example of caring for the community by closing. On Saturday morning, the studio posted on Instagram that there would be a free class on Zoom. They gave an hour's notice. I was excited about this because it was what I was craving—a way to unite my mind with my heart and not my nervous system.

The class was packed. The class was packed on zoom with over 100 people—at capacity. People all over the Philadelphia area and all over the US somehow found out about this and tuned in—at the end of the class she held a discussion and we all talked with one another about our specific context, how we were feeling, all of it. It actually connected me to a woman who I had been practicing with for months who was an adolescent therapist in Devon who has helped me with resources for our parents this week.

What followed was someone donating a business membership and now 100s of people are tuning in EVERY day at 12 to care for themselves, to breathe, to be grounded and reminded to take comfort and have courage. Tuesday we were blessed with the prayer of St. Patrick, Wednesday we did a breath prayer with the serenity prayer and I couldn't stop the tears. These women in the midst of darkness and wilderness for so many, are reaching into the homes of people who most need it all over the nation and providing a way to process this. They continue to offer this out of a need they see in their community to care for your mental health in a time of great stress. **THIS.** **THIS** my friends is living as children of the light. So, this week, I encourage you to take some time to think:

What can I take comfort in today?

What do I want to have the courage for today?

We are all handling this in our own way, and grace abounds that we are all doing the best we can. Know that you are in the palm of God's hand—the very hand that holds the dust in this Lenten season, and that God will lead us through this—take comfort, take heart, have courage. Amen.