

SALT CO

10/13/24

“Why There are People on Earth”

“He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name’s sake...”

Psalm 23:3

***“When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established,
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?”***

Psalm 8:3-4

WELCOME TO THE SALT CO!

Welcome those who are joining us online.

This is the HUB of Seasoned Adult Ministry. For anyone new...by SEASONED ADULTS we mean:

SEASONED AS IN...

Chronologically-- we’ve lived a lot of seasons of life

BUT more importantly-

Spiritually--- ...like when sodium and chlorine combined make SALT... by the grace of God, when we receive Christ into our lives we become like THIS [gesture: one hand—two hands—joined together]

We become something beautiful, a *new creation*...transformed and *transforming* for the rest of our lives.

JESUS CALLS US THE SALT OF THE EARTH.

And this is the SALT CO (**where we** pull off the road to **gather**, AND share stories about **how to faithfully navigate** the ever-changing terrain on Route 60+; and Route 60++...and +++...

A place where we re-tool, re-fuel and re-charge.

And celebrate.

Birthdays and anniversaries in October.

SING HAPPY BIRTHDAY. (It's so good you are on the planet!!)

Our theme this fall is Living a Psalm 23 Kind of Life. We're using as our guide the book written by Dallas Willard entitled Life Without Lack which we're recommending but NOT requiring. There's a copy on each table for you to have a look. Pick up a copy at the bookstore. Each chapter is like a vista viewpoint on the amazing terrain the 23rd Psalm opens up for us.

The other book wrapped in a map is a reminder that we are exploring spiritual terrain together.

That Sierra cup on top of the books is just to suggest what it's like to live a Psalm 23 kind of life- a life with the Shepherd so full my cup runs over- like a cup full of mountain spring water on a long challenging hike.

At our first vista point we were taken to the highest point of our journey and invited to stop and gaze on who God really is. Our guide, Dallas Willard, reminded us that this is where it all has to start, because if our ideas about God are too small, we will never be able to trust God enough to live a Psalm 23 kind of life believing we have everything we need. The psalm begins, the *LORD* is our Shepherd!

This led to the second vista where we came last SALT CO, where we realized the more we come to know about God the more we also come to know about ourselves.

Which brings us to this third vista, and a question- *Why?*

Why does God shepherd us so carefully?

It's the purpose question. Sooner or later we all come to face it. *Why am I here? Why am I on the planet?* Willard's title for this is "Why There are People on Earth".

Today this is a monumental question because so much in our culture that helped us have a sense of belonging and meaning has fallen apart. There's a very popular course at Stanford for juniors and seniors that has a wait list entitled "Design Your Life". One of the creators of this course (Dave Evans) is a follower of Jesus. A course at Harvard taught by Arthur Brooks, a Catholic Christian is also wait listed. Its subject is "happiness".

Young people are searching for meaning and purpose. They are thirsty for a cup of cold mountain spring water. For a Psalm 23 kind of life.

So are our fellow Seasoned Adults. Say the word "retirement" and many feel panic.

When I was pastoring in Florida, I met a man who in one of our first conversations shared with me that he had spent four decades on Wall Street. It was a soul grinding experience. Finally, he decided it was time to exit that world. As he put it, "*I needed to find out who I really am.*"

Another man owned a construction company and had spent his career building huge projects all over the western U.S. But then he fell ill. In the last months of his life, he and I spent time together mainly over one question, "*Who am I now?*"

Henri Nouwen, Catholic priest and writer says *we can come to believe* that our worth is tied to "what we do" "what we have" and "what others think of us". That usually leads to what he calls "the greatest trap in life [which] is self-rejection".

It goes like this:

The world says our worth is tied to our "productivity", and by that, the world means what can be measured in speed, weight, profit, size, gross and net. Most of us were raised in this.

What if we believe what the "world says about us" What happens when we are less... "productive"? What is our "worth" then? What will others think of us then?

So our guide tackles this trap head on. We've gazed on the incredible mind-boggling goodness of the Lord. We're ready now for the next vista point...to stop and gaze for a while on this question: *Why* are we here? Willard frames this question from a Psalm 23 kind of life perspective:

"Why would the magnificent God who created the universe want to be in a personal relationship with you and be your Shepherd?"

To find an answer to this question Willard brings us to Psalm 8:4,

***"...what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?"***

Psalm 8:4

Let's spend a little time with this psalm. Check out this six minute video

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d_-xvaK4wlw

Psalm 8 is for anyone who is beginning to forget that we have been created with a purpose. It echoes what God has always had in Mind for humans in Genesis 1 (and 2).

We forget this. We are STILL in charge of the creatures in the waters, that fly through the air, and every living thing that moves on the land. We are to be fruitful (a quality of life) and to multiply (what can be measured!).

In Genesis 2 Adam (which means humankind), made from the clay of the ground (ADAMAH in Hebrew) is to tend the garden.

It is Christian to care for creation. In fact, it is a calling from which there is no retirement.

When we tend a garden, we are delving into an ancient calling.

In Seasoned Adults ministry we believe it works like this. I call it our "mantra". It goes like this:

- where we contribute, we feel we belong.
- where we contribute and belong, we have a sense of purpose.
- where we contribute and belong and have a sense of purpose, we have hope.

Why? Because we have been made in His image. This is what Genesis 1 and 2 remind us of. It is what Psalm 8 recalls to people who have grown to believe that they are worthless. It is what David pondered in his darkest times.

The 23rd psalm begins with the greatness of God. Remember that this magnificent God made you and me with a purpose and a calling. As C.S. Lewis put it, *“There are no ordinary people...”*

You are no ordinary person.

Willard says,

“Here’s my point: just as we have a tremendously difficult time conceiving of or imagining what God is like, so we have a tremendously difficult time imagining what people are really like.”
(p. 55)

What makes you “great”? I’m NOT asking what makes you loved, because we are loved of God because God loves what God creates, because God IS love!

The question is what makes you and me “great”?

Here’s Dallas Willard:

“What is it that makes human beings so precious? It is this: they are capable of being faithful to God and committed to the promotion of good in the world. They are capable of giving their lives for these things, even to the point of dying for them. ‘No one has greater love than this,’ Jesus said, ‘to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.’ (John 15:13)”

Then Willard expands on this with these hopeful, but also sobering words,

“We have the potential to create something incredibly precious and good, and God is going to bring it to pass. If we miss our chance to participate with him, we miss our chance, but he is not going to be defeated in this. He is going to create a community of loving, creative, intelligent, loyal, faithful, and powerful human beings, and they are going to rule the earth. It is going to come to pass. If you want to be a part of that, just get on board.” (p. 57). Rev. 5:10; 22:5.

Jesus said what happens when we give ourselves over to him, when we surrender our lives- we find our lives. This can happen at any age. We discover our purpose. (To know God and to know oneself, and which comes first is a mystery...)

I heard an entrepreneur, Chip Conley on a podcast recently reflecting on the third third stage of life and he said he’s now less focused on being someone who “CAN DO IT” and he is now more focused on being a “CONDUIT”. Like Jacob and the ladder realizing he could be part of making what’s UP THERE...come DOWN HERE...by God’s grace at work in him.

That’s how we become the “salt of the earth”. Amen?

There is no such thing as retirement from our calling in the kingdom of God. Guess what THIS means?!

It means...ready for this... wait for it... WORK IS A GOOD THING!!

For some this is a totally insane idea. When I was in seminary, I earned money one year by working for Mayflower Moving Co. There was one guy I dreaded being paired with. His name was Bill. Bill liked to smoke. He would stand outside the truck watching me wrestle an overstuffed chair into the load. Between drags on his cigarette he would say, ‘You know Dick, you do nice work...’

Grrrrrrrr!

There is work in the Garden *before* the Fall. Adam had plenty to do, Work is a good four-letter word. *Work is what we do to add. To*

contribute. To help. To benefit. To encourage. To listen. To support. To tend. To care.

Willard says, “Your work is the total amount of lasting good that you will accomplish in your lifetime. That might include your job, but for many of us, our families will be the largest part of the lasting good we produce.”

I would add, “our worshiping communities...”

What are you working on nowadays?

And here’s the thing. As we do good work something begins to happen in us...

Willard describes it like this:

“Here is a truth you must never forget: ... He’s more interested in the person you are becoming than in your work, or your ministry, or your job. And the surest way to realize the full potential of your God-designed self is to live in eternity while you are in time, conscious of the loving gaze of your all-sufficient Shepherd, in whose care nothing of the good you do is lost. It is stored up in your own self and in the lives of others you have touched.” p. 61

Why do we so often fail in our calling? In a word it comes to broken trust in our relationships. Our Shepherd must step in. And has! The key is He gave Himself for us, and in following Him we practice also giving ourselves up for others. What happens is just amazing.

Willard concludes,

“There is nothing that makes God happier than human beings, redeemed by the grace of God, devoting their lives- the moments and hours of their days- to the good of others and of creation, to the glory of God. That is our privilege, and the reason we are here. That is what humans are, why God pays attention to us, and why God abides with us.” p. 66

Let's talk about this.

TABLE TALK

1. Share your name and a job or a role you have in your family, your community, this church that you really enjoyed or are enjoying now.
2. Pastor Dick read this quote: *"We have the potential to create something incredibly precious and good, and God is going to bring it to pass. If we miss our chance to participate with him, we miss our chance, but he is not going to be defeated in this. He is going to create a community of loving, creative, intelligent, loyal, faithful, and powerful human beings, and they are going to rule the earth. It is going to come to pass. If you want to be a part of that, just get on board."* (p. 57)

What is the effect on you of hearing that you have both the potential to create something incredibly precious and good and that we can miss our chance to do so? What might it look like for you to "get on board"?

3. Can you give an example of noticing something in your "ordinary" everyday life that reminds you that this is also a place where the life of God flows?
4. Ephesians 5:10 says, **"Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord."** What are some ways you can spin God's bowtie this week?

So, our Psalm 23 Kind of Life invites us to follow the Shepherd as he leads us in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Here is our "calling, to come with Him, to follow Him on His path.

Righteousness is about rightness. About helping restore things, to set things right. To create conditions for growth. About good work.

Story of. Ray Warrington. Suzanne and I were at gathering yesterday to give thanks to the Shepherd for his life. What happened when he went on a mission trip with our church. A fruitful life!

One right step at a time. I read somewhere that it's thought that the root word for TORAH in Hebrew suggests an image of tossing a stone on a foggy mountain path. The shepherd tosses a stone and then listens to hear the sound of it landing, or perhaps, of no sound at all! Then he takes a step and tosses another stone.

We follow the Shepherd one right step at a time on His path of righteousness. This is His good pleasure for us. A Psalm 23 Kind of Life.

WALK THE TALK

1. Begin each day this week with the 23rd Psalm. Read, recite slowly as if you are on a walk.
2. As you take a step, maybe someone comes to mind- Who could use a phone call or a visit this week? What could you share with that person? What might they want or need to talk about? Watch the "sides" along your path to notice who's there.
3. Look for a place or situation that needs tending, mending.

Let's say together the 23rd Psalm...

Psalm 23

***The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not lack.
He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.
He restores my soul.***

He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.

***For you are with me.
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.***

***You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil.
My cup overflows.***

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

