

<sup>1</sup>The LORD | is my shepherd; I shall not | be in want. <sup>2</sup>The LORD makes me lie down | in green pastures and leads me beside still waters. <sup>3</sup>You restore my | soul, O LORD, and guide me along right pathways | for your name's sake. <sup>4</sup>Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall | fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they | comfort me. <sup>5</sup>You prepare a table before me in the presence | of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil, and my cup is | running over. <sup>6</sup>Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days | of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the | LORD forever.

## **Wednesday Evening Service, April 29, 2020 - Reflection and Prayer Practice**

### **The Examen and Psalm 23**

**Pastor Amy Zalk Larson**

The 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm assures us that God is present in all things - with us even in the shadow of death, even in the presence of our enemies. It promises that God's goodness and mercy follow us all the days of our life.

Yet, so often the days go past and we have no sense of God's goodness and mercy. In fact, we don't have any sense of the day at all as we just slog through this life.

An ancient discernment practice called The Examen, developed by St. Ignatius of Loyola, is a wonderful gift to help us become aware of God's presence in the moments of each day.

The Examen is a simple practice that involves looking back over a day, or a week, or a meeting with others - looking back and reviewing everything that has happened. It involves paying attention to what has happened and noticing first: Where you felt alive, where you felt connected to God and others. Then: You reflect on where you felt drained, depleted and disconnected.

God's voice calls us into life, so the wisdom we gain from looking at our days and noticing what brought life and what depleted life can help us to discern invitations from God. It can help us to hear God's voice speaking to us. It can help us to ask: Is God inviting me to move away from something that drains me, or to approach it differently, or to ask for help? Is God inviting me to move more fully into something that is bringing life?

Usually The Examen is practiced with five simple steps. I will share these in print and record this so you can return to it.

1. Acknowledge God's presence with you - lighting a candle and taking a breath may help with this.
2. Review the day in a posture of gratitude. We can give thanks in all things, not necessarily for all things. So even in the midst of COVID-19, we can give thanks for the gifts of the day even as we don't give thanks for the virus. So review the day in a posture of gratitude.
3. Recognize where you felt alive and connected to God and others.
4. Notice and pray about where you felt depleted and drained.
5. Look with hope for a new tomorrow.