



Where God is Leading Us

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Joseph Henry Gilmore lived between 1834 and 1918. He graduated from Brown University and Newton Theological institution. At one point in his life, he wrote about his experience about how God was leading him in life and faith.

Joseph wrote, “I was supplying for a couple of Sundays in the pulpit of the First Baptist church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. At the mid-week service, on the 26th of March, 1862, I set out to give the people an exposition of the Twenty-third Psalm, which I had given before on three or four occasions, but this time I did not get further than the words, ‘He leadeth me.’ Those words took hold of me as they had never done before, and I saw them in a significant and wondrous beauty of which I had never dreamed.”

Joseph continued to share the circumstances of the time in which he was living. “It was the darkest hour of the Civil War. I did not refer to that fact – that is, I don’t think I did – but it may subconsciously have led me to realize that God’s leadership is the one significant fact in human experience, that it makes no difference how we are led, or whether we are led, so long as we are sure God is leading us.”

The old familiar song Joseph Gilmore wrote is called “He Leadeth Me.”

*He leadeth me, O blessed thought
O words with heavenly comfort fraught
Whate'er I do, where'er I be
Still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me*

*He leadeth me, He leadeth me
By his own hand, He leadeth me
His faithful follower I would be
For by his hand He leadeth me*

As Christians, you and I ask the question: “Where is God leading me in this life?” Just like Joseph Gilmore we turn to a Psalm of comfort and guidance as we view God as the Shepherd who leads in a deep valley: **He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.** [Psalm 23:2-3 (NRSV)]

God is there for us at all times. Job had God there with him through all the difficulties of his life and the challenges to his faith. Abraham was led by God

to leave a safe and known land and venture to an unknown land in a distant place.

In the story of Naomi and her widowed daughters-in-law, she asked them to return to their families as she was returning to her own people. But it is Ruth who says to Naomi, **“Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die—there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!”** [Ruth 1:16-17 (NRSV)] God led Ruth to a new land, a different God and an unknown future.

Friends, you and I are called by god to lead a life of faithfulness and worship. The worship we experience in this place is where God calls us to be forgiven and redeemed, loved and accepted, and open to grace and care. God also leads us to a new life, a new faith, a forgiven heart, and a love for others.

Yes, God leads people to experience a confident journey of faith. However, many of us are still fearful as to where God is leading us. We are more prone to control our lives as we are to let God take over the steering wheel. There is more anxiety about the future because it carries with it the unknown and uncertain parts of life.

Of course, we can try to hold on to the past and hope that we can hold off the inevitable changes that the future brings. Fortunately, God is the only one who knows what the future holds.

Throughout my ministry, I have been at the bed sides of many a person who is dying. We have visited about their family, the events of their lives and what they are going through as their life comes to a close. Many lament the past while others have enjoyed life to the fullest. Some wish they could change the past while others celebrate the life they have lead.

At some point in their dying, many come to a point of calm and say they are ready. The faithful are ready to go to where god is waiting for them. It usually at that point that I can see a resolute confidence in their approaching death. I always pray for the Lord to lead them from this life over the threshold of death and into God's heavenly presence.

As a congregation, you wonder about the future and what God has in store for you. I find the hope that God instills in a congregation can be infectious and assuring. Where this congregation has been in the past and what you have gone through in recent years established the ground work for the future. The future is yet to be determined and it may be totally different than what you see today. Still, God is the One to lead you into the future.

The Psalmist wrote in Psalm chapter 139 verses 7 thru 10 about the inescapable God and where God is leading the faithful. **“7Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? 8If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. 9If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, 10even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.”** God leads the faithful, leads us, to acknowledge his gracious presence in their lives and our lives no matter where they go or what they do; no matter where we go or what we do.

Jesus leads us into a relationship where he is foremost in our minds and hearts. He extends his loving arms and welcoming heart to those called to his presence. When we make our commitment to him, we are to follow his example. We are to live a life committed to his ways and words.

The Psalmist writes a hymn in Psalm 61 about how God has protected, provided and assured him of ongoing favor. In his appeal, he seeks a relationship of companionship through life. He sings, **¹Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer. ²From the end of the earth I call to you, when my heart is faint. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I; ³for you are my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy. ⁴Let me abide in your tent forever, find refuge under the shelter of your wings. Selah**

⁸So I will always sing praises to your name, as I pay my vows day after day.

Our Lord asks us to be strong in our faith rather than fearful in times of rough waters. He has calmed many a storm so that the faithful can remain unafraid. Our response is to move ahead with assurance of the Lord's presence. And always seek the Lord's presence no matter what is happening in our lives or what is coming down the road.

There is a story that a woman named Kim Sherer wrote about her son who was fearful during a thunderstorm. It is called "Storms of Life."

"One night while my young son, Ryan, was sleeping, a storm began brewing outside. After a loud clap of thunder, I heard him wake up so I headed toward his room to comfort him. He asked me to stay with him until he fell asleep. As I lay there I realized he hadn't asked me to make the storm go away, but to stay with him. How many times, I wondered, have I asked God to take away the storms of life, when instead I need to ask him to stay with me and help me weather them more peacefully?"

What a beautiful thought!" The presence of God.

My dear sisters and brothers, the Lord is leading us to be faithful and bold in our lives. Yes, the future is uncertain in spite of our well laid plans and we may even experience anxiety along the way. Nevertheless, the Lord is leading us to be ever vigilant in keeping our eyes, hearts, minds and souls on the Savior. And to seek the presence of God.

So may we follow the lead of the one who is our God and our Redeemer. God moves us into the future and only God knows what the future holds for each one of us and for this church.

May it be so.

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Let us pray: "Gracious God,
We thank you for adopting us into your family through the miracle of

your grace, and for calling us to be brothers and sisters to each other.
Today, loving God, we pray for our mothers:

- who cared for us when we were helpless
- who comforted us when we were hurt
- whose love and care we often took for granted.

Today we pray for:

- those who are grieving the loss of their mother,
- those who never knew their biological mother, and now yearn for her
- those who have experienced the wonder of an adopted mother's love
- the families separated by war or conflict.
- Lord, give them special blessings.

Oh God, keep us united with you and with each other, so that we can be and become all that we are meant to be. In Jesus name we pray." Amen. [re:Worship]

{Mother's Day Illustrations can be found below.}}

Scriptural support.

Psalm 61

¹Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer.

²From the end of the earth I call to you, when my heart is faint. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I; ³for you are my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy. ⁴Let me abide in your tent forever, find refuge under the shelter of your wings. Selah

⁵For you, O God, have heard my vows; you have given me the heritage of those who fear your name. ⁶Prolong the life of the king; may his years endure to all generations! ⁷May he be enthroned forever before God; appoint steadfast love and faithfulness to watch over him!

⁸So I will always sing praises to your name, as I pay my vows day after day.

Psalm 23:1-6 (NKJV)

¹The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

²He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.

³He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake.

⁴Yea, 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.

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over.

⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever.

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Mother's Day illustrations:

Lorne Sanny of The Navigators once wrote of his mother: "My mother gave birth to me in a frontier house on a Midwestern prairie. On the kitchen counter she placed a list of the ingredients necessary for my formula. At the top of the list was 'prayer,' and that remained at the top of her list for me throughout her life...I have her to thank for firmly establishing my spiritual roots." *Today in the Word*, January, 1990, p. 23.

Attending church in Kentucky, we watched an especially verbal and boisterous child being hurried out, slung under his irate mother's arm. No one in the congregation so much as raised an eyebrow -- until the child captured everyone's attention by crying out in a charming Southern accent, "Ya'll pray for me now!" Jean McMahon (Dyer, Ind.) in *Reader's Digest*, April 1980.

A four-year-old and a six-year-old presented their Mom with a house plant. They had used their own money and she was thrilled. The older of them said with a sad face, "There was a bouquet that we wanted to give you at the flower shop. It was real pretty, but it was too expensive. It had a ribbon on it that said, 'Rest in Peace,' and we thought it would be just perfect since you are always asking for a little peace so that you can rest."