



# One Page Sermon

## By Pastor Robb McCoy

### June 18, 2023

## Love is the right path

Recap of Sermon from 6/18/23 by Robb McCoy  
Scripture: Psalm 23:3

The words *righteousness* and *justice* feel like different words in modern English. Righteousness feels very personal. To be righteous is to follow the rules. A righteous person is holy, makes right choices, and doesn't sin. Justice feels more public. Justice is about fairness, equity, and accountability.

In the Bible however, righteousness and Justice are pretty much synonyms. In Psalm 23:3, we read the Hebrew word *tsedeq*. This word shows up 118 times in the Hebrew Bible. It can be used as an adjective to describe a weight or scale. It can be turned into a noun to describe an upright person. Here, the pathway of *tsedeq* has been traditionally translated to "paths of righteousness." The Common English Bible uses "proper paths." Robert Alter's *Hebrew Bible* translates the phrase, "pathways of justice."

The traditional phrase "he leads me on paths of righteousness" makes it feel like, "he makes me follow the rules." The Alter translation of "he leads me on pathways of justice" opens up the Psalm to new, bigger possibilities. Pathways of justice are paths that change the world. Pathways of justice are steps toward greater peace, equity, and hope.

The surprising thing about the Psalm however, is that we often but a hard break between verses 3 and 4. We think of God leading us on paths of justice, and then move into the next part "lo though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death..." Why would the Good Shepherd lead us on a right path that leads to the dark valley?

The pathway of love is the pathway of justice. And the pathway of justice often leads into dark places. Just ask John Lewis.

Pathways of justice can take many forms. For John Lewis, and 600 protesters, the pathway of justice led them from Selma, Alabama to the capitol in Montgomery. On a march to gain their voting rights, the valley of the shadow of death came in the form of the Edmund Pettus Bridge, where state troopers met them with billy clubs, tear gas, and violence. "Bloody Sunday" left 58 people injured and John Lewis with a fractured skull. Two weeks later they marched again, this time with the National Guard and 3200 marchers.

Pathways of justice often lead us into the valley of the shadow of death. Movements for liberation and equality are

seldom met with hospitality. But sometimes pathways of justice are as simple as choosing the right t-shirt.

"Hey Ellie, which t-shirt should I wear?" I asked Ellie as I was getting ready to sit at our church's table at the Pride event in Moline. "The Free Dad Hugs shirt," she said. This is a shirt that represents love and acceptance for people who have been ostracized from their own family. I gave many hugs on Saturday, but one stood out.

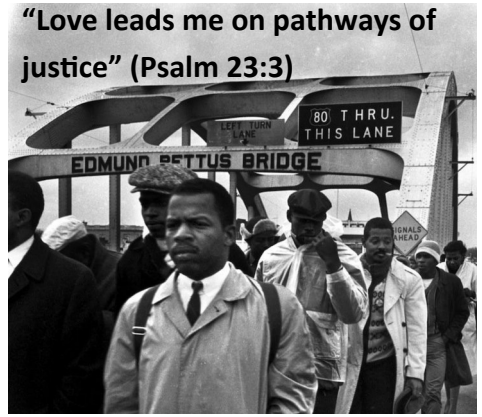
A young person sheepishly pointed to my shirt, and said, "Can I?"

Realizing what they wanted, I smiled and said, "Absolutely"

While we were hugging they said, "Thanks, I really needed this. My Dad doesn't really hug me since I came out." We squeezed a little tighter, then let go. With tears in both of our eyes, we talked a little about our church. They were somewhat surprised that a church would be at a Pride event, handing out candy and buttons. They thanked me again for the hug, and I said, "I'm glad to do it. I'll hug you whenever you need it. And there's a whole church in downtown Rock Island full of people who would hug you, too."

I don't know if that young person will come to our Reconciling Sunday. I don't know if I will ever see them again. But I know that they will always remember that hug. They will always remember that invitation. They will always know that moment of love.

Pathways of justice can take us scary places. When we allow Love to be our shepherd, we find green pastures. We find still waters. When we allow love to guide our paths, we are led to justice. Why? For God's name—which is love, which is justice, which is peace. Love leads us on pathways of justice in the name of Love. Yes, pathways can lead us to the dark shadows of racism, patriarchy, misogyny, homophobia, consumption, and exploitation. They can also lead us to a hug with a young person who needs to know that they are loved.



"Love leads me on pathways of justice" (Psalm 23:3)

**Next Week: Psalm 23:4**

**Love protects through the darkest valley**