



One Page Sermon

By Pastor Robb McCoy

July 9, 2023

Love pursues me

Sermon Recap from 7/9/2023

Psalm 23:6

Jeff Hagen is my hero. I read about him in a recent article from Slate.com by Stephen Lurie. The article was about the legendary Dawn to Dusk to Dawn marathon. The run lasts for 24 hours. Participants run around a 400 meter high school track and simply see how far they can go. Jeff Hagen was one of the runners. At this year's event Hagen became the sixth person ever, and second American, to run for 100 miles in 24 hour at the age of 75.

The runners who participate in these kinds of events—known as ultramarathons, or just “ultras,” are more than physical wonders. They have to have a keen sense of self-knowledge.

“The sport demands you learn the ins and outs of your body and mind, and then teach them to accomplish your goals. You must figure out how fast is too fast; how slow is too slow. You have to know how to cool or heat your body, when it needs to hydrate, and how often it needs to pee...

“Then you have to learn what to do when your body won't listen, when it all feels more like torture: How you think about pain, how you *don't* think about pain, how you recover from setbacks, when you decide to rest, and whether you'll be able to—and should—get back up. On a track, all of that is perpetually on display.”

The amount of care, knowledge, and concentration it takes to go for 24 hours is incredible. Now think for a moment of the Good Shepherd, who pursues us with loving kindness all the days of our life. That's not just 24 hours. That's every 24 hours, for eternity.

And pursue, by the way, is the right word. The traditional translation of Psalm 23:6 is “goodness and mercy follows me.” This however, isn't strong enough of a word. Pursue, chase, or hunt are how the word is used in other parts of Scripture. Pharaoh pursued the Hebrews as they escaped bondage. Saul pursued David when he was looking to consolidate his power. The good shepherd pursues us with goodness (*tob*) and mercy (*hessed*).

Again, the full use of these Hebrew words reveal to us the depth of the pursuit that is happening. “Good” is the word used over and over in Genesis 1 to describe God's creation. Goodness is the heart of who God is, and goodness is the foundation of all of creation. The Good Shepherd pursues us with goodness because that is the fundamental adjective used to describe the world.

Mercy, or in Hebrew *hessed*, is used 247 times in the Hebrew Bible, usually to describe the nature of God. The word that is often simply mercy in the this Psalm is steadfast love, loyal love, enduring love. It is a varied word that describe the vast, unconditional, and eternal love of God. God is *hessed*. God is *tob*. And these things pursue us.

They do not follow us. God is not a passive follower, hoping to someday catch up to us. God is pursuing us with *tob* and *hessed*. From Creation the End. From Alpha to Omega, God is pursuing us.

Hagen may have superhuman endurance, but God pursues us not just for 24 hours, but for every 24 hours for all time. With deep knowledge of every ache, pain, and stumble. With an awareness of every step, every stride, every sign that we pass, every grain of dirt that is pressed underfoot. With intimate knowledge of the ways that we try to avoid God, the obstacles of our own construction, the detours that we take to try and lose God. Still, God pursues us.

Hopefully we can stop, rest, and let God catch up. Psalm 23 is a reminder to us that God is the Good Shepherd. So maybe we can lie down in green pastures, beside the still waters, walk the pathways of justice protected by God's grace as we travel through the inevitable dark places that justice leads. We can see the table set before as a place of plenty and space to let peace grow. Hopefully through it all we can allow God's goodness and mercy to find us, and we will dwell together with Christ all the days of our life.

**Next Week: Worship at Shwiebert Park
at 10:30 a.m.**