

# THE FIRST 15

Monday, August 26, 2024

Today is Monday, August 26 and we are learning what the Bible says about the House of the Lord.

## OPENING PRAYER

*Oh, Lord, my Shepherd, how I look forward to these quiet minutes of the early morning alone with You. Thank You for Your faithfulness and steadfast love. I relinquish my worries, set down my burdens and rest in the stillness of Your presence. Whatever the upcoming day holds for me, I know You will be by my side, leading my heart and guiding my steps. Amen.*

## SCRIPTURE

***The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want; 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. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies; thou anointest my head with oil, my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for ever. Psalm 23:1-6 (RSV)***

## REFLECTION

This week we complete our summer study of the 23rd Psalm. As the Psalm concludes, we focus on these final words, "I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever." These may be some of the most comforting and reassuring words in all of scripture. Often read at death beds and funeral services, they remind us of the frailty of the human body, the brevity of earthly life and the promise of eternity. Until we are faced with inevitable aging, the death of a loved one or the diagnosis of disease, we often go about our busy lives without a care or thought about what lies beyond the grave. In youth, we sometimes feel invincible, knowing we have so much life ahead of us. Yet, in time we realize that life is fragile and every day is a precious opportunity.

How long do you expect to live? If you were born in the year 1700, the average life expectancy was 37 years old. In the year 1800, the average life expectancy rose to 41 years old. In 1900, the average life expectancy was 47 years of age. Today the average life expectancy in America is 76 years old - 73 for men and 79 for women. Women tend to live longer. The life expectancy today in Japan is 84 years old – the highest in the world.

The oldest person living in the world today is 117 years old and lives in Spain. The second oldest person living in the world today is 116 years old and lives in Japan. The oldest person living in the United States is a woman named Elizabeth Frances who is 115. Elizabeth was born in July 1909 and currently resides in a nursing home in Houston, Texas. She attributes her long life to her strong faith in God and consistent healthy habits.

Maybe you will live to be 115-117 years old. That is a long time to walk this earth. None of us know how long we will be here and draw breath. None of us know how many years we will be alive. But even if it is 117 years (a very long time), that 117 years compared to an eternity is nothing. Even an unusually long life in comparison to eternal life is like a tiny little blip. Our lives here are relatively very short. We only have one life to live, we must make this life matter, we must make every moment count, we must give it our all.

John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world, He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life." This is God's amazing promise realized through the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, His Son, the Anointed One. All we need to do is believe He truly is God's Son and eternal life is offered to us. At the end of life, no matter how many years it may be, we can confidently say along with the Psalmist David, "I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Thanks be to God.

**Ask:** How has the promise of eternal life been a comfort to me in the losses of my past? How might God want the promise of eternal life to give me hope for the future?

**Pause and Pray**

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

*Holy and loving God, thank you for the joy of living life on this earth. I am grateful for the beating of my heart, the soundness of my breath, the movement of my limbs and the opportunity to celebrate another day in Your presence and service. Help me keep my perspective a heavenly one, weighing the brevity of this earthly existence with the profound promise of a celestial eternity. Let me waste no time in loving, encouraging and helping others every moment of every day while I have opportunity. Amen.*