

Sermon for the Fifth Week in Lent, Year B
The Rev. Ian Burch
St. Mark's Episcopal Church | Milwaukee, WI
March 23, 2021
Mini-Mass for Lent 5

I had the great fortune to travel to Scotland several years ago. Travis and I rented a car and drove around the kingdom, pretty much from one end to another over a couple of weeks. I remember driving a stick shift car on the wrong side of the road through the Cairngorm mountains fairly certain I was going to slip right off the edge. But we did. And I found, weirdly, that I belonged there. Or that I had some kind of mystical connection to the mountains and the streams there. I know that is unusually romantic sounding for me, but I cannot deny that I felt at home when I drove around Inverness, Edinburgh, and the Isle of Skye.

One day, as we were slowly making our way back through the highlands to the cities and our eventual flight home, we were driving near a town called Fort William. It wasn't on our itinerary but seemed a nice enough town. We even remarked that maybe we should visit it when we came again. After we had driven through, somehow, we ended up in the middle of stunning valleys and some deep, cold lakes. At one point, the scenery was so spectacular, we decided to pull the car over and to take it all in.

As we stood there, taking in the mountains and the valleys spread out before us, with white cloud clinging to their peaks like tufts of dandelion fuzz, we heard bagpipes drifting up through the mist. I kid you not, some street performer had set up shop in full Highland dress and was playing his pipes, probably for tourists just like us.

And something happened to me. Something about the beauty and the music mixed in my chest and I found myself tearing up. I promise you, up to that date, I had never cried over a landscape before, but something about that moment in time moved me. It revived my soul.

The psalmist today promises that God will do just that — revive our souls. And who can't say that after a year like we have had, that our souls are not in deep need of reviving.

Think of the days at home worrying. Think about the newscasts the last year and all the images of illness and death that we have consumed. Think about the moment when going to the grocery store became a dangerous event or when you heard that a friend or a loved one died of COVID. Think about all the children in our lives who have been cooped up at home for a year when they really wanted to be with friends, being young and alive.

I think our souls are in serious need of revival. I think the soul of this parish community is in serious need of revival. I think that we are in need of the bread and the wine made holy. I think we are in need of the waters of baptism. I think we are in need of songs and hugs and coffee and being together.

God does not have a lot to say about which public health policies are best. And, in fact, when most biblical writers were doing their work, they didn't know what a virus was and still thought that blindness was caused by sins that your father committed.

But they knew something about the love of God in hard times. They knew that this radical and unending love of God for God's people would be a balm to us right when we need it most. And I think we do need it now.

I thank God that we are able to be together again, even in this limited way. And I thank God that we have been accompanied through this difficult year by Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

And I stand here convinced that God will indeed revive our souls. There may be some grief in there that needs to be expressed. There may be some fatigue or some fear or some anger that needs tending. Whatever it is, God knows about it and will revive it. It might not be on the side of a mountain for you, but this much is true: no matter how empty your cup is after this year we have had, God's love will fill it. Here is to mountain vistas, random bagpipes, and God's inexhaustible love. To God be the Glory. Amen.

*The Lord is my shepherd; *
I shall not be in want.*

*He makes me lie down in green pastures *
and leads me beside still waters.*

*He revives my soul *
and guides me along right pathways for his Name's sake.*

*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.*

*You spread a table before me in the presence of those who trouble me; *
you have anointed my head with oil,
and my cup is running over.*

*Surely your goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, *
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.*