The metaphor of a bridge is very useful in our present situation. A bridge gets us from here to there over a body of water that may be turbulent at times. The Psalmist, in Psalm 23, tells us God leads us beside still waters. But water isn’t always still. I remember a Japanese print of crashing waves, tsunami waves that would swallow a boat, and the caption under it was, “He leads me beside the still waters.” It also said, “The sea is tranquil now, it’s wild in ecstasy.” What an ironic phrase to use.

At other times the Psalmist calls on God to save him because the water is up to his neck and he is drowning. I’ve felt that way at times, not literally drowning, but overwhelmed by life’s circumstances. This may be one of those times for you in the church. Rev. Nancy, who has been your shepherd for many years has been forced to retire by circumstances beyond hers or your control. The green pastures and still waters you’ve been used to have been swept away and you are adrift toward an uncertain future.

It is a time like this that we need hear Psalm 46. “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult.”

There are times when the ground beneath our feet seems to shake as it does in an earthquake, when solid ground suddenly becomes like quicksand. This may be one of those times for you, when you cannot seem to get your bearings.

I hope to provide a bridge over the troubled waters of the present time. I’ve been listening to the song, “Bridge Over Troubled Water,” by Simon and Garfunkel, and it gave me a metaphorical image of my role here. I want to be a bridge for you to get from here to the next place in your journey, with your interim minister, Annette Mott.

We need to remember always that we are not alone. God is with us every unsure step of the way. God asks us to be still and know him. 10 “Be still,” God says, “and know that I am God!

I am exalted among the nations,

I am exalted in the earth.”

11 The Lord of hosts is with us;

the God of Jacob is our refuge.”

Need I remind you that Jacob was as much a scoundrel as there is in Scripture. He stole his brother, Esau’s birthright from his nearly blind, dying father, Isaac. He also wrestled with God,
in the form of an angel, until he received a blessing and a new name: Israel. God has used many questionable characters to do great things. There are many things God may want you to do. Just keep your hearts and minds open for God’s call.

The Psalmist gives us the full spectrum of human emotions from comfort for afflictions, to despair, to outright anger, to peace for our souls. Psalm 46 captures a whole range of these emotions. It speaks to the ways we may be feeling today. You have had to say, “Goodbye,” to your beloved Pastor, Rev. Nancy. It wasn’t a parting either of you wished for, but one that was forced on her and you by circumstances beyond the control of either of you. The disease of cancer is a God damned disease that consumes our bodies, but not our souls. God never inflicts it on anyone, even those who seem to deserve it. It most often afflicts people like Rev. Nancy, for no apparent reason. It just is.

Many of us may be living with cancer either in ourselves or in those we love. I used to describe myself as a once and future cancer patient. I had melanoma 45 years ago. I didn’t think I’d live to see my sons grow up. They are now middle aged adults with families of their own, but each of them is living with a chronic disease. Eric has Crone’s disease and Bill has diabetes. Since last year I have had to say I am a once and present cancer patient. I have prostate cancer. But it will not define me, just as Rev Nancy’s cancer does not define her. She is a good and faithful servant of God.

The Psalmist didn’t look at life through rose colored glasses. Instead he saw life as it is and expressed himself most eloquently. He expressed himself in raw emotions at times. The Psalms are the prayer book and song book of the Bible. Psalm 46 is called a song. We do not know its original tune, but it was probably sung in the temple and synagogues in times of hardship, to give a feeling of hope. It is most often used today at funeral services, although it is much more than a funeral Psalm. It is a Psalm we can turn to as often as we need it. “Be still,” the Psalmist says, “and know that I am God.”

Psalm 23 is perhaps the most familiar Psalm of all. It is called the Shepherd Psalm. “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.” What a beautiful, comforting image that is. As far as we know Jesus never quoted that Psalm, but as he hung dying on the cross, he quoted from the Psalm just before it, Psalm 22, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?” That is a very different image from Psalm 23. Yet it was an honest expression of Jesus’ anguish, as he was dying.

When the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Rome he affirmed eternal truth. He said, “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.” We are sometimes overwhelmed
with circumstances for which we cannot find words. It is then that the Spirit’s sighs are all that we may utter. Paul went on to say, “God who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”

Paul also said, “We know all things work together for good for those who are called according to his purpose. . . . He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for us, will he not with him give us everything else?”

Then he quoted Psalm 44. “For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.” Passages from the Hebrews Scriptures are often cited in the Gospels and the Epistles.

Paul knew how tenuous and fragile life can be. He said, “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels. Nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Jesus reassured his followers that God is always there to protect them and us. When he was facing the time of his own death, he told them, “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” Even on the night he was betrayed, he told the disciples, “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me, because I live, you also will live. . . . But the advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

With all the assurances of God’s presence in all times and places we can go through even that dark valley of death’s shadow with God at our side. “Do not let your hearts be troubled; do not be afraid.”

10 “Be still, and know that I am God!” says our God.

“I am exalted among the nations,

I am exalted in the earth.”

11 The Lord of hosts is with us;

the God of Jacob is our refuge.”

We will cross over the troubled waters on a bridge built by God, till we arrive safely on the other side. Thanks be to God. Amen.