

Service for Sunday, May 3, 2020

Since many of you are unable to watch and hear today's worship service, lessons, a short message, and prayers for this day are provided for your devotion.

Greeting

Today is sometimes called "Good Shepherd Sunday." Jesus is called the "gate" of the sheep in today's gospel. The risen Christ opens the way to abundant life. He anoints our heads with oil and guides us beside the still waters of our baptism. Each Sunday he spreads a feast before us amid the world's violence and war. We go forth to be signs of the resurrection and extend God's tender care to all creation.

May the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

The Word

The 23rd Psalm.

- ¹The LORD is my shepherd;
I shall not be in want.
- ²The LORD makes me lie down in green pastures
and leads me beside still waters.
- ³You restore my soul, O LORD,
and guide me along right pathways for your name's sake.
- ⁴Though 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.
- ⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil, and my cup is | running over.
- ⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Jesus uses an image familiar to the people of his day to make a point about spiritual leadership. Those who listen to Jesus are led to abundant life.

Today's Gospel is from the 10th Chapter of John. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

[Jesus said:] ¹"Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. ²The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵They will not

follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.” ⁶Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁷So again Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” (John 10:1-10)

The Word of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ.**

The Message

As I was preparing for today’s message, I came across an article by Nancy deClaissé-Walford, the Professor of Old Testament and Biblical Languages at the McAfee School of Theology, Mercer University, in Atlanta, Georgia. In fact, this reading was so highly appreciated and valued that it has been published two times in a pastor’s research guide for sermon prep. I thought it was an amazing lesson on the 23rd Psalm. So I’d like to share it with you this morning. Just so you know, I have taken the liberty of excluding a few parts of deClaissé-Walford’s writing and adding a few words of my own.

“In this type of psalm, [Psalm 23] singers praise God for God's goodness in delivering them from various life-threatening situations—illness, oppression, enemy attack, etc. In Psalm 23, the psalm singer praises God as the good shepherd who guides the psalmist—as shepherds might guide the flocks of sheep or goats in their charge—through a myriad of life situations.

The familiarity of the words of the psalm can hinder the reader from truly entering into the meaning and intent of its words. Thus, the paraphrase of Eugene Peterson might be a helpful beginning point for [a clearer understanding of this Psalm]. He interprets Psalm 23 in the following way:

God, my shepherd! I don't need a thing.
 You have bedded me down in lush meadows;
 you find me quiet pools to drink from.
 True to your word, you let me catch my breath
 and send me in the right direction.
 Even when the way goes through Death Valley,
 I'm not afraid when you walk by my side.
 Your trusty shepherd's crook makes me feel secure.

You serve me a six-course dinner
 right in front of my enemies.
 You revive my drooping head;
 my cup brims with blessing.
 Your beauty and love chase after me
 every day of my life.
 I'm back home in the house of God
 for the rest of my life.

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." "God, my shepherd! I don't need a thing." Which words are correct, which are true? Both are. The words of Psalm 23 are those of an ancestor [of] our faith who was delivered, in some way, from danger and who praised God for help in the midst of that danger.

The psalm singer takes on the role of a sheep or goat, animals herded and cared for by shepherds. These are animals that, without the care of a shepherd, would be easy prey for other animals in the open grazing land.

In the psalm, the shepherd provides green pastures for grazing, still waters for drinking, and right paths for travel from one grazing place to another. In troubled areas, the protection of the shepherd provides safe passage for the flock. And even when trouble is nearby, the shepherd makes sure that the flock can feed and water in safety and can lie down for a night's rest. Therefore, the flock can count on continued existence because of the faithfulness of the shepherd.

Descriptions of God such as those found in Psalm 23 abound in the book of Psalms. God cares for, provides for, and protects those who are faithful. This message of Psalm 23 is clear. But when we examine Psalm 23 in its location within the book of Psalms, new insights into its meaning may emerge. Psalm 23 follows Psalm 22, a heartfelt lament, one connected with the passion of Jesus in the New Testament. The opening words of Psalm 22 are the words spoken by Jesus on the crucifixion cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Laments in the book of Psalms are structured in a movement of five elements: [first the psalmist calls on God to listen, and then the psalm singer tells God the reason for crying out to God. And after such crying out, the psalmist tells God what he or she wants God to do. The psalmist narrates why God should be trusted, by remembering God's faithfulness in the past. And finally, the psalmist offers of praise to the Lord.]

The structure of Psalm 22 exhibits an escalation, a piling up, of elements of the lament. The first [words] of lament are followed by words of trust . The second [part] contains words of lament,

words of trust, and words of petition. [Finally], however, [the psalm] moves directly from words of lament to words of petition, with no words of trust intervening. [Where is the trust in God with out any words of calm, without any words of trust?]

Might we be permitted to read Psalm 23, an individual hymn of thanksgiving, as the words of trust that are missing from the last piece of Psalm 22?

The two psalms share vocabulary and concepts, thus strengthening an argument for connecting them. Psalm 23 expresses confidence in God as shepherd to the psalmist. In Psalm 22, however, the psalmist accuses God of being far away and not answering the psalmist's cry for help; of being silent when those around mock and shake their heads; of paying no heed when bulls and lions and dogs and evildoers surround; and of ignoring the fact that the psalmist's body is shriveled and emaciated.

Indeed, in Psalm 22, God lays the psalmist in "the dust of *death*" "*because*" "a band of *evildoers* surround." The singer cries out, "but *you*, O LORD, *do not be far from me*" for "*trouble* is nearby." In contrast, in Psalm 23, even while walking through "the valley of the shadow of *death*," the psalmist will fear no "*evil*," "*because*" "*you are with me*." In fact, God prepares a table for the psalmist "in front of my *troublers*."

Reading Psalm 23 as a word of trust in answer to the heartfelt lament of Psalm 22 may add a new dimension of understanding to both psalms. Connecting them does not diminish the individual poetic and theological character of either, but rather creates a powerful statement of trust in the Lord."

So, in times of lament, we can be assured of the blessings only God provides, in the protection only God can give, and the future God promises us - a life in God's house. Amen.

Hymn Poem

Shepherd Me, O God

Used with special permission from Augsburg Fortress Publishing during the global pandemic
Text by Marty Haugen

*Shepherd me, O God,
Beyond my wants,
Beyond my fears,
From Death into life.*

*God is my shepherd, so nothing shall I want.
I rest in the meadows of faithfulness and truth.
I walk by the quiet waters of peace.*

*Gently you raise me
And heal my weary soul.
You lead me by pathways of righteous and truth,
My spirit shall sing the music of your name.*

*Shepherd me, O God,
Beyond my wants,
Beyond my fears,
From death into life.*

*Though I should wander the valley of death,
I fear no evil.
For you are at my side,
Your rod and staff,
My comfort and my hope.*

*You have set a banquet of love
In the face of hatred.
[You crown me] with love
Beyond my power to hold.*

*Shepherd me, O God,
Beyond my wants,
Beyond my fears,
From death into life.*

*Surely kindness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life.
I will dwell in the house of my God
Forever more.*

*Shepherd me, O God,
Beyond my wants,
Beyond my fears,
From death into life.*

Prayers of the People

Uplifted by the promised hope of healing and resurrection, we join the people of God in all times and places in praying for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

A brief silence.

Shepherding God, we thank you for the educational ministries of your church. Enrich the work of teachers, professors, mentors, advisors, and faculty at colleges, seminaries, and learning sites. Those who teach and lead need you more than ever during this time of separation from students. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Creating God, we praise you for those who maintain and operate farm equipment, for those who plant and harvest crops, for local farmers' markets, and for those involved in agriculture of any kind. Strengthen their hands as they feed the world. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Guiding God, no one should be in want. Bid the nations to return to your paths of righteousness and inspire our leaders to walk in your ways, so that all may have the opportunity to live abundantly and sustainably. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Comforting God, you carry us tenderly. We pray for those who walk through dark valleys overshadowed by anxiety and overwhelmed with suffering, especially Bonnie Duggan, Jeanne Roen, Edna Mae Lewis, Judy - Curt Meyer's sister, Doug Nordland - family/friend of Derek Miller, Rose – Lenora Scheer's niece, Greg Turner, Fern Softing, Brandon - Victoria Savanh's cousin, and all others who need our care. Accomplish healing through the work of doctors, nurses, physical therapists, nutritionists, and all who tend to human bodies. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Nurturing God, you desire justice for the hungry. Bless advocacy work, food pantries, and feeding ministries in our congregations and communities. May none of our neighbors lack for basic needs. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Everlasting God, your beloved have heard your voice; you have called them by name and guided them to your side in death. We thank you for their lives of faithful witness. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

With bold confidence in your love, almighty God, we place all for whom we pray into your eternal care; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Let us pray together the prayer that Jesus teaches us.

Our Father, who art in heaven hallowed by thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory. Forever and ever. Amen.

Blessing and Sending

May the One who brought forth Jesus from the dead
raise you to new life every day, fill you with hope,
and turn your mourning into dancing.

Almighty God, Father, ✝ Son, and Holy Spirit,
bless you now and forever.

Amen.

Christ is risen. Christ is beside us. Christ is with us.
Go in peace. Share the good news.

Thanks be to God. Alleluia!