

191027 Deacon Alan Hart

In the name of the one true God. Who is God, the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen. Well, I'll tell you something's very, very wrong today because usually when I preach, I can't sleep the night before. I think it's not good enough Yada, yada and I'm nervous. I don't, something's wrong. I'm not nervous today. Maybe that's because I'm not really going to preach so much as I'm going to tell you some stories, true stories that have happened with me in regarding Psalm 23. I don't think I'm any different than anybody else, but psalm 23 really resonates with me for a lot of reasons. It always has. Some of you know, I was not brought up Episcopalian, rather, I was brought up as a Baptist and at seven or eight years old, probably just like you did, we were in Sunday school and we were required to learn psalm 23. To commit it to memory that and the Lord's prayer and right away I had problem with it. The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. Oh, if he's my shepherd, why don't I want him? No, no, no, no. It means you will not be in want. You will not need things cause he'll take care of you.

King David really hit this. It's like a Gary Sorensen drive right down the middle of the fairway. He got so right all his imagery of the Psalm 23 and the reason of course, he was a shepherd himself before he was the warrior and the King of Israel. And so he knew all about taking care of sheep. Even that part, you'll anoint my head with oil. He knew that as all shepherds did, that they, you know we humans we're bothered by bugs and flies and but a sheep really has a problem with bugs because the flies will land on their nose and their head and they drop larva in there. And this would keep the sheep healthy by anointing his head with oil.

Most of my life I've followed psalm 23 and I've let the Lord be, my shepherd sometimes have strayed away from that and tried to be my own shepherd. And it hasn't worked out too well. You might've experienced that too. Well the first time Psalm 23 really jumped at me was when I was going through a bad time in my life when I was about half as old as I am now. And besides being very broken down and hurt I wasn't doing well financially and mother's day came around and I really didn't have enough money to give my mother something good. So I even went to her house that day. I said to her, I have no gift to bring "a rum pum pum".

Anyway, I did have something cause I said, mom, this isn't much, but you know, I got my guitar out and I wrote this, I took this scripture verse and put it to music. It's psalm 23 and some of you have heard me sing this here before. I couldn't do it today. And then I kinda forgot about it and the next morning she called me. She said, Alan, I love that song. It's very special to me. And to this day I think it's like the best thing I've ever done. Anyway now this is what I want to talk to you about since I've been a clergyman psalm 23 I found out I'm not the only one that's crazy about psalm 23, so are other people. First I want to tell you about Leonard. My first deacon assignment was at Christ Church in Schenectady and one afternoon I got a phone call from that office manager, Lorraine Coleman who has passed away since then.

She said, deacon, what are you doing this afternoon? I said, Oh, I was hanging out. Well, father John Scott from Calvary called and would like a favor from you. I said, sure what. One of his parishioners is in the emergency room at Ellis hospital and he is out of town, he can't get there. Would you go and pray for him? I said, well of course I will. So some of you know, you get to the emergency room, you can't just walk right in. And you're at the monitor, you tell who you want to see and either they'll beep you in or they'll tell you to get lost. So I said, I'd like to see Leonard Nelser, okay, let me find out. And a minute later they came back on the Intercom, "yes, you can come in". So I walk in the hallway and there's a woman there obviously who is the man's wife. He says, who are you? I didn't ask for a Catholic priest. I said, well, you're in luck cause I'm an Episcopal deacon.

I said, I'd like to come and pray for your husband because the priest at his church is unable to come today. And she said, well, he hasn't gone to church in a long, long time. The last time we went to church, Truman was president. I said, well, you know, here I am do you want me to pray for him, she said well there he is go ask him. Well here's this poor man. He's in his mid eighties and he's lying on his back with the oxygen mask and she said, Leonard, this is an Episcopal deacon and he'd like to pray for you is that okay and he can't talk. So I read him Psalm one 121, and he squeezed my hand. Then I read him Psalm 23 and you squeezed it a lot harder. And then I anointed him and prayed for him.

And the wife said thank you for coming to see him. And I said, well, the million dollar question is, do you want me to come back a couple of days to see how he's doing? And he nodded his head again. So a couple of days later I went back

and by now the man had done a lot better. He was in a regular room and this time he didn't have the mask. And so he could talk. He said, I was awfully glad you came to see me and I especially liked it that you read Psalm 23. Cause I said, that's always been important to me. That got me through the war.

So a couple of months went by, it was right around Christmas time, December 21st 22nd like that. And the phone rang and it was the wife and she said, could you possibly come to our house and talk to Leonard? He really wants to see you. Sure so we got the address, it was blue barn road or something like that Burnt Hills way. So we get to the house, she went with me this time, when we get to the house and she opens the door and she goes Mary Carol and she goes, Betty, they knew each other. So if they were in the aerobic dancing class together, so it's small world.

My husband used to call it erotic dancing. It wasn't, anyway, I'm talking to Leonard. Then she Talking to Betty in different rooms. And what Leonard wanted is he said, could you do me a big favor? He says, you know, I know I dodged a big bullet last month, but I know my time is almost over. And you'd make me feel a lot better if I knew that you would preside at my funeral. I said, oh Leonard, don't worry about that. You're going to be fine. There's no, no. I know what's coming and I want you to do this for me. I said, okay, but don't plan on it happening any time soon. A month later he died. I did his funeral and I realized he considered Psalm 23 as much as I did . Now I'll tell you about another one. Her name is Harriet.

I cannot remember her last name, but this was when I was at st Mary's of Lake Luzerne. But in addition to that, I was doing a service from the reserve sacrament every Wednesday morning at the other Ellis hospital. And I was the one that used to be St. Clare's. And there was a patient there. Her name was Harriet, and she had been in a coma. I don't know how long, at least the two years that I'd been there every Wednesday. And Harriet's daughter is a nurse there and she wanted Harriet to go to the mass because as she said, and as we all know, sometimes somebody's in a desperate situation or coma and you don't know what they hear and what they understand. She said, I want her to, she always went to church. I want her to be there. So we would, myself and, activity girls and later on, Mary Carol joined after she retired and we would wheel these people down in their chairs and in their beds to the upper floor, down to the basement or not the basement. what am I trying to say.the auditorium and Harriet's chair was especially heavy. It was like trying to steer the Titanic away from the iceberg. You know, it was really hard to manage. One day, here's Harriet and she's in the middle of the room and the Psalm appointed that day was Psalm 23 and I said, now, everybody knows this. That's very popular. Let's read it all in unison. So we start reading Psalm 23 and about halfway through it I noticed that Harriet's lips were moving. She was saying the psalm, this is a woman who's been in a coma for a couple of years and I pointed to Edi. Look at Harriet? Well, we couldn't believe it.

Well, we finished the mass and as soon as that mass was over, I mean I didn't walk. I ran to find that nurse, her daughter, I said to kind of come down the stairs or your mother came out of her coma. She said, what did you do? I said, well, we read Psalm 23 and she started to aha I get it. I, so what do you mean, why is it so important? She said, now this is the nurse . When I was a little girl, my brother and I were riding bicycles and we went across the street and a car hit my brother and he died from it. And they read Psalm 23 at the funeral. Never since then, it's been very important to her.

Well, often and Father would probably know this, but often that happens. Somebody comes out of a coma and they're with it for a little while and then they die. And that's what happened to Harriet. But the power of that psalm woke that woman up and helped Leonard. God knows it's helped me. David got so right. Jesus picked it up too. If you remember in John 10 I am the good shepherd. As the Father knows me and I know the Father in the same way. I know my sheep and they know me and I am willing to die for them. There are other sheep that belonged to me that are not in this sheep fold. I must bring them too, they will listen to my voice and they will become one flock with one shepherd. If you haven't read Psalm 23 lately, I'm going to suggest that you take it home and read it because probably isn't a better verse in the Bible. In the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen