



FROM THE PASTOR

Psalm 23 A Psalm of David. (RSV)

- ¹ The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want;
² he makes me lie down in green pastures.
 He leads me beside still waters;
³ he restores my soul.
 He leads me in paths of righteousness
 for his name's sake.
⁴ 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.
⁵ Thou preparest a table before me
 in the presence of my enemies;
 thou anointest my head with oil,
 my cup overflows.
⁶ 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.

Today is July 1. July 1 means summer. As we were coming out of the bleak midwinter, and the Coronavirus hit, we looked to summer as the time when it would all be over and life would be back to normal. I was looking forward to paraphrasing one of my favorite lines from Shakespeare's play RICHARD III: NOW IS THE WINTER OF OUR DISCONTENT MADE GLORIOUS SUMMER BY THIS SUN OF [WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA]...

But the Coronavirus just isn't going away. I can only imagine the bitter disappointment of some of the business owners who were so thrilled to be reopening, but who are again closing their doors or facing old restrictions. Just about every form of summer entertainment has been cancelled. Here in Pittsburgh there will be no fireworks, celebrations at the Point or anywhere else in the city. Public swimming pools have not been filled. All we are getting this summer around here is summer—with little or nothing to do in it.

All this has rocked our sense of security. Unfortunately, this being an election year, it took no time at all for the virus to become a political issue. Who gets political power has become more important to those in our

society with significant power and money, than the well being of the people. It would be unconstitutional, of course, but wouldn't it be great if Congress passed a law mandating that half of all money received by any political campaign had to be given to non-partisan, scientific health-related research? Call me a cynic if you want to. I prefer the term 'skeptical'. But wouldn't it be wonderful, if we could have the amount of money that has and will be spent on public relations and campaigning in this election year for scientific research?

Jesus never ran for the office of the "Good Shepherd." He simply is. For the last few hundred years, our culture has been living under the curious concept that Jesus needs our approval to be the Good Shepherd. There are many, many people who are convinced that unless they believe in Jesus, he doesn't exist and there are even more who may not believe that, but live their lives as if they do. But Jesus isn't going to wait to be elected to be the Good Shepherd. He is simply going to say, "FOLLOW ME." Some will follow—some will not. Those who follow will be with Jesus. Those who do not will be apart from Jesus. It is as simple as that.



Psalm 23 is probably the most familiar and favorite psalm and Bible chapter in the entire Bible. We all love it. We love the picture that it paints. Like the final two chapters of Revelation, it paints a picture of the fulfillment of God's Kingdom. It shows us that the Bible is finally about God's merciful grace and grace-filled love. I have read it more times than I could possibly guess and still today that sixth and final verse still amazes me: "***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.***"

I am getting through these difficult days by reminding myself that in the midst of all the competing voices demanding my allegiance, only one is the Good Shepherd and I will put my trust in him. I will try to listen wisely and willingly to the voices of our leaders, but I will trust in the Good Shepherd. I shall find my joy in the Good Shepherd. I shall follow Him through these difficult days.

In Christ's service,
Pastor Brian Shirey

Post Scripts:

- † Our lessons for this Sunday, July 5, the Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, are:
First Lesson: Zechariah 9:9-12 Psalm: 145:1-14
Second Lesson: Romans 7:-14-25a Matthew 11:25-30
- † The upticks we are seeing in cases of the virus in many places show clearly that we must continue to be cautious. We need not panic or overreact. While western Pennsylvania continues to be better off than many parts of the country, we must be prudent. The number of cases in our region have gone up although the number of deaths, thankfully, has not. It seems to me—and I am speaking only for myself—this may mean that we may be stuck in a cautious state longer than we originally thought. Due to our fine Centennial Hall and the room it affords us, I can't see us not being able to continue to worship together. However, moving back into the sanctuary and gathering for various activities and ministries may still not be possible for a while longer than we had hoped. We cannot completely guarantee safety from infection nor do we say that everybody should attend. I'm sure that our Lord wants you to continue to use prudence and caution. Let's err on the side of caution. If you are not feeling well or have been around anyone at risk for COVID-19, you should wait awhile before coming back. If you have any factors that might make you more vulnerable to getting or would have more difficulty recovering from the virus, you should wait a while before coming back.
- † Watch out in the days ahead for more information about the status of future activities at St. Luke's. Keep praying for one another and pray for our President, Governor and other leaders. And trust in our Good Shepherd to get us through the remainder of this crisis.