

**Prayer of the Day:**

O Lord Jesus Christ, you are the Good Shepherd who laid down your life for the sheep. Lead us now to the still waters of your life-giving Word that we may abide in your Father's house forevermore; for you live and reign with him and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

**Verse of the Day:**

Alleluia. Alleluia. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia. I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me. Alleluia. (John 10:14)

**Sermon Text:**

It's Good Shepherd Sunday as the church year continues to move along even during pandemic. The Good Shepherd is probably one of the best known and perhaps the most loved of all the pictures of our Savior. These artists renditions hang in our hallways at home. I'm guessing they, or at least something very much like them, formulate the usual scene we think of when we contemplate our Shepherd. The Shepherd lovingly holding the sheep, carrying the little lamb maybe even on His shoulders. All is right, all is wonderful. Perhaps we could call it our Shepherd from the viewpoint of the sheep.

I have another image of our Good Shepherd. I ran across it a year or so ago, probably while looking at images for a class or something. It grabbed my attention too. So much so that I printed it out and have it in my office. Right off the bat, I have to admit it is not nearly as warm and cuddly. Wolves snarling and circling for the kill, a slightly more battle-ready Shepherd, the lamb still in the arm but not to snuggle and love on, rather to protect from the dangers that literally are stalking it. All doesn't seem so right, everything maybe doesn't look so wonderful. There is real trouble and real tribulation. Perhaps we would say this one comes from the viewpoint of the Shepherd.

Today we have opportunity to see both pictures in the words of Psalm 23, the Shepherd's Psalm and as we do recall anew why both pictures are for our eternal good.

Psalm 23, much like the first two pictures, is a well-known and universally loved Psalm. It has even found a place in our funeral liturgy for the comfort it so regularly bestows. It is as beautifully poetic as it is deep in meaning.

*The Lord's my shepherd, I shall not want.* Perhaps the words which are recorded in our worship planning materials say it well for us. "The image of shepherd and sheep are certainly familiar to modern Christians, but do those concepts resonate as deeply for us as they did for the people of God 2000 years ago? 'In such a landscape as Judea, where a day's pasture is thinly scattered over an unfenced tract of country, covered with delusive paths, frequented by wild beasts, and rolling off into the desert, the shepherd and his character are indispensable. On some

**TEXT: Psalm 23**

*A psalm of David.*

<sup>1</sup> The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. <sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, <sup>3</sup> he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. <sup>4</sup> Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. <sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. <sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever. (NIV84)

high moor, across which at night the hyenas howl, when you meet him, sleepless, far-sighted, weather-beaten, armed, leaning on his staff, and looking out over his scattered sheep, every one of them on his heart, you understand why the shepherd of Judea sprang to the front in his people's history; why they gave his name to their kings; why Christ took him as the type of self-sacrifice' (George Smith) Planning CWS: Fourth Sunday of Easter."

David says, "That's Jesus, I shall not want". Of course, that phrase gives me pause a bit today. People seem to be in want, in want of health, in want of job stability, in want of the freedom to move and play. Don't misread the words of our God dear friends. God isn't saying "you have a shepherd so everyone gets a brand-new car and mansions to rival those we see Hollywood movie stars hunkered down in these days." Instead, think of more along the lines of Paul's secret of contentment. The Lord is my shepherd and that's enough. What else could I need? Even if health or wealth, liberty or life should be removed from me, I still have Jesus so in reality, hard as it often is to remember, I lack nothing.

*He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.* Okay so there is a sermon in every sentence and while we may be safe at home, you'll probably also be asleep at home if I don't pick up the pace a bit so now focus on who does all of this. Jesus is the shepherd after all so He leads us to His pastures that are truly lush and green, the waters that are quiet and safe, He restores us as He leads us along those paths which are righteous. Problem is, we often don't want to listen. The grass is greener else-where, the waters may not be as quiet and safe but they sure look like a lot of fun and as we wander off well the soul ends up far less refreshed along paths that indulge sin and unbelief rather than the righteousness He supplies and gives.

*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. <sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.* Our sin means there are other valleys and the devil and the world around us present constant threats. The wolves are snarling around us. God has not abandoned us, though He should have, perhaps we would have. His law and gospel, the rod and staff of our Great Good Shepherd continually guide us, more than that His powerful Gospel promises holds out forgiveness whether in Word or Sacraments because our Shepherd endured it all for us. He knew want of health and wealth, of liberty and life, endured the snarling bite of the wolves around Him as they drew His blood and not our own, lived perfectly throughout it all, was even abandoned in the valley that causes us the most dread of all and not just by disciples overcome by the fear He had come to defeat but abandoned by His father in heaven, so that we would not have to be. On the cross, He pays for all the offenses of His wayward and wandering sheep so that we might have the assurance of His resurrection, the promise of His ascension, we are heirs, and given a seat at the very table of heaven. *Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*

It is precisely because of these truths that David sings this song today. It's because of these truths that you and I can find solace in lounging in the green pasture lands or toiling in troublesome valleys. I dare say there is a reason this Psalm seems to be a go to in times of trouble. We have a Shepherd, willing to stand against the snarling wolves of sin, Satan, hell that we may remain safely in His arms for all eternity. Yes, the Lord is our Shepherd dear friends. What more could we need? Amen.