

Easter 4 A Good Shepherd Sunday

A Meditation on the 23rd Psalm by the Rev. Timothy Thompson, shared with Christ the King Lutheran Church, May 3, 2020 by The Rev. Kisten Thompson

Psalm 23; John 10:1-10

Jesus the Good Shepherd

10 “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. **2** The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. **3** The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. **4** When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. **5** They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.” **6** Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

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

Today is the Sunday in the church year that we call “Good Shepherd” Sunday. Each year on the 4th Sunday of Easter, we hear the 23rd Psalm and a portion of the 10th chapter of John’s Gospel, Jesus’ teaching on life, abundant life, and those who would try to snatch that life away from those that God loves and protects.

And as we all know, we are in deep and turbulent times where lives have been turned upside down, nothing is as it was and everything seems to be chaos, isolation or confusion. It has now been 53 days since the World Health Organization named this coronavirus a “pandemic”. It has been 53 days since we were able to sit beside our loved ones in care facilities. It has been 53 days since many of us could see children or grandchildren in person. It has been 53 days since our young people have been able to be together in school. It has been 53 days of healthcare and essential workers putting their lives at risk to care for those who have been stricken with Covid-19. It has been more than 53 days since we were last able to gather together as a community of believers.

I am grateful then that today is Good Shepherd Sunday. I am grateful to hear the voice of Jesus say, “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” I am grateful to have the voice of the psalmist sing the words of trust in the Lord who is the shepherd, who names and describes the abundant life that Jesus brings.

And if you are like me, even though we are sheltering at home, the days can feel very full and chaotic as the boundaries of work and home become blurred and confused. Perhaps you need a small respite, even for a few moments to rest, to abide, to bask in the familiar words and images of the 23rd Psalm.

So I invite you to find a place to relax, settle in, and enter into a green pasture beside still waters. Shut your eyes if you would like, take a deep breath and listen to your heart in prayer to Jesus, your shepherd.

Lord, I am so glad that you're here with me...I'm so glad that you are my shepherd.

I know sometimes I forget you're there.

I get worried or distracted and it **feels** like I'm alone. But you **are** there. You are. You're **my** shepherd; always watching over me, always near.

And I am not afraid.

Thank you, Lord, thank you, Lord, for giving me rest. Sometimes I think that if you didn't make me life down I probably never would. I have a hard time knowing when to stop. But you know what I need. You know I need a still place; a quiet place; a little patch of green in the warm sun. My Sabbath.

And Lord, I believe that you restore my soul. I believe it, but I'm not even sure I know what that means. I know what it means to have a good night's sleep; to wake up refreshed and restored in my body, but my soul, Lord? You restore my soul?

I'm afraid...I'm afraid I've forgotten what it feels like to have a fresh soul.

Put me back together, Lord, re-create my heart, restore **my** soul.

And then lead me...lead me on the right paths; the **good** paths; the beautiful and lovely paths among the high mountains where the air is pure and the world is bright.

Not the dark paths, not the dark paths...that run into the valleys and the shadows and the deathly cold. **You** don't lead me there; I find **those** places on my own.

I wander off. I get lost. I can't see you! But you're there. Truly, you are my shepherd. You reach out towards me with your shepherd's staff and you pull me back until I'm by your side again and safe.

Those places Lord, those dark places, there are dark **things** there too. They hide in the shadows of my life. They hide in the shadows of my heart.

And from the shadows they leap out to harm me and they catch me by surprise-but not you.
You saw them coming.

You see them, and you know them, and you drive them off with your rod: the dark things scatter like leaves in the wind.

You **are** my shepherd. I fear no evil.

Then, right there, right in that place and right before their evil eyes, you bring me food.

And what a feast! Honey and bread...Milk and cheese. Fruit full of juice and wine, sweet wine, the wine of delight and joy and laughter pours into my cup in an endless stream. It spills over the side and runs down, and you laugh.

Then you, O Lord, you honor me. You honor me, when I should honor you. You serve me, when I should be serving you. And you lift me up and say: "Here, now! Here is my child, my beloved, the apple of my eye!"

Is there no end to your goodness? No, there is no end to the blessings you bring.

For all my days, and all the days that follow, I shall dwell in your house. And I shall live with you, My Shepherd, my Lord, My God, forever.

Amen.