

Pastor David Anglada
Sermon Outline
Grace Lutheran Church and School
Malverne, New York
Psalm 23 Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow



John 10:1-10: "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.

Psalm 23

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 right paths for his name's sake. 4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me. 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint 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 my whole life long.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION:

Let us pray: Loving God, we pray that your Holy Spirit will strengthen us to be devoted to the teachings of your Word, that through it, we may hear your voice and follow it into eternal life. Good morning, thank you for joining us today on the fourth Sunday of Easter, traditionally known as "Shepherd Sunday," and Psalm 23 is set each year as the Psalm for the day. Today's reading focuses on God as our great Shepherd. Psalm 23 is one chapter in the Holy Scriptures that is best known in both Judaism and Christianity.

This Psalm is usually read during funerals when pastors and deacons visit the sick in hospitals, nursing homes as well as shut ins in their homes. Let me share something with which I have observed while, on my pastoral visits, to many seniors in their homes, I have noticed that their bibles are opened to Psalm 23.

Now, let me say from the beginning, while this Psalm has many applications and touches about death, it is not primarily about death. However, there is nothing wrong to have this text at a funeral, but it is more than being about death, this Psalm is about ***being utterly dependent on God.***

Allow me to ask you a question, how many times have you heard Psalm 23 read at a funeral? How many times have you heard Psalm 23 during the eulogy? How many times have you listened to a sermon on Psalm 23? I have only heard maybe 2 or 3 sermons on Psalm 23 in the past 40th years.

While it is a favorite Psalm to those who are dying, it can impact by giving grace and comfort to those who have lost a loved one. However, this morning I would like to show you that this Psalm has a greater impact on our lives than during the loss of a loved one. We will see implications that can apply to death and the grace and comfort that can be found in these words.

So, this morning I want us to think beyond the grave when reading or hearing psalm 23. I want us to think of our lives dependent on God. This is the purpose of the author of this beautiful, life-giving Psalm. I believe that the six verses found in Psalm 23 can change our lives and our understanding of God in our lives.

So, I encourage you to listen with an open heart.

A good question to start today's message is, who wrote Psalm 23? Well, most Hebrew Scripture or Old Testament scholars are not sure. We know that it is written in the style of King David or that the Psalm was written in honor of King David. King David did not write Psalm 23. However, we give King David credit for Psalm 23. So, I am taking the liberty to say that King David wrote Psalm 23. ***It sounds more biblical for me.*** What we do know is that the writer of this wonderful poem or song of praise was on a spiritual journey, something shattered his or her world.

It could have been an illness, betrayal, or rejection by the people that surrounded the individual. Most likely, it was about the death of someone who the writer cared deeply for, most likely a family member or a friend.

The author, the Psalm, is in deep despair; his or her world has grown dark and deemed. They cannot see the light at the end of the tunnel. They are in the deep darkness of the oceans, and the darkness has captured their thinking. As well as it has dominated their thoughts. They cannot escape their gloominess and despair.

The author of this Psalm sees no point in going on with life; life is not worth living. But in their despair the person cried out to God, and a miracle happened. **The miracle was not that the dead came back to life or that they would never again suffer human pain and suffering.** And that God would replace everything they lost. God answered the prayer of the author or authors

of this Psalm. How by taking them by the hand, and guiding the person through **the valley of the shadow of death.**

The Lord is my Shepherd, Yahweh or Adonai is my Shepherd.

The earliest ancestors of the Hebrew people were nomads, owing no property bound to no location but traveling with their flock and herds. Where-ever they found grass and drinkable water there they called home. Good drinking water was not accessible as it is today. It rained two to four times a year; in the region of Mesopotamia. The Shepherd acknowledged a partnership between the grace of heaven, water, sun, and their hard work provided their daily needs for themselves and family members.

The role of the Shepherd was: Love his sheep, cared for his sheep, healed their sheep when the sheep was wounded, carried the sheep when the sheep was in an accident or when wild animals wounded one the sheep. The Good Shepherd paid attention to each of his sheep and knows them by name. The Good Shepherd provided good grass for the sheep's nourishment. The good Shepherd provided good water for the herd of sheep.

But most important the Shepherd protected the herd of sheep when wild animals **wanted to have a lamb chop for dinner.** The great Shepherd was always willing to give his life for his sheep. The excellent Shepherd provided a sense of safety. The good Shepherd protects and cares for the flock of sheep along with guidance for them. Sheep left to themselves are helpless and defenseless against predators. The writer of the Psalm utilizes the sheep as a metaphor for human life and its connection to God. The Psalmist sees God as the only higher power that truly cares about humans and that God truly cares for each one of the flocks.

The Psalmist is trying to communicate that sheep are dependent on the Shepherd for its mere existence. But most important that life without a shepherd becomes a life of chaos. The Psalmist is not trying to convey that bad things will happen to us, but the opposite. ***Bad things will happen to us.*** However, the Good Shepherd is with us.

Yes, we live in a complicated world, with various viruses that kill us, but God brings healing to us. We grieve for the loss of family members and friends, **but we will grow whole again.** We need the Shepherd in our lives to hold us when we are hurting. And, yes, at times, we need the Shepherd to carry us when we do not have the strength to go on. Sometimes life becomes so overcoming that we just do not have the strength to go on, and we need someone to hold us up.

What about you? O, our worry days just consume us, and we find that we just cannot go on. But God comes down to us and holds our brokenness and despair with compassion and love.

Occasionally, I need the Lord to be my Shepherd and hold me, have you ever found yourself wanting God just to hold you.

In 1498 Michelangelo created a sculpture called the Pieta, Mary, the mother of Jesus holding the broken body of her son on her lap looking at him with such tenderness and sorrow; it is a combination of love and grief. The problem with the sculpture is that the four gospels in the New Testament never witness Mary holding the body of Jesus after the Crucifixion. Some have suggested and I concur that Michelangelo use the woman in the sculptures as a figure of God holding the broken body of Jesus. God's heart was broken at Calvary.

My good friends God knows about suffering and pain, when we hurt God holds us in his arms and whispers, do not worry I am here for you. I shall not want; there a story of a preacher who goes to visit a parishioner who is dying of cancer. He begins to recite the 23rd Psalm. The Lord is my Shepherd, and I shall not want.

The dying lady opens her eyes and says, "but pastor I want"! Of course, she wants, she wants to be healthy, she wants to live, she wants to see her children and grandchildren. The intent of the text in Hebrew scriptures is "**I shall lack for nothing that God will provide for me, everything I need. Or God will give us everything we need.**

My grandfather uses to say: "**The Lord is my Shepherd, what more do I need?**

The promise from verse 1 is that God, our faithful Shepherd, will see to it that each member of his flock has enough food, water and a warm, safe place to sleep. God will provide us with everything we need! ***Not What I Want But What We Need!***

"The Lord makes me lie down in green pastures and leads me beside still waters." Or he leads me in resting place.

The Shepherd finds a safe place to lie down his sheep. This Psalm captures the sense of rest that comes from utter trust in God. And, provides good grass and still water. When we speak about "still water" in Hebrew, "still water" is not rushing water. Sheep cannot drink from rushing water; the water must be still. Sheep need water for their existence. We cannot survive without water. Good shepherds are known for making sure that their sheep can drink from still water.

We will continue this conversation next week.

RESPONSE TO THE WORD:

Let us pray: Keeper of our souls when we go astray, help us return to you, Shepherd and guardian. May the words we have heard resonate within us here at Grace Lutheran Church and School, like a drum in the valley, and may its echo never fade. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the God who calls us by name lead you out to green pastures and lead you into the safety of Christ's fold. Please join this morning for our virtual community gathering at 10 am. Visit our website at www.glcas.org to join our virtual gathering. Thank you for joining us this morning, and remember, God loves you and cares about you.