



1616 W. Mequon Road, Mequon WI 53092
(262)241-3121 www.stjohnsmequon.org
Email: office@stjohnsmequon.org
Pastor James Tiefel
(262) 853-9723 (cell#)
Email: pastortiefel@gmail.com

The Fourth Sunday of Easter Good Shepherd Sunday May 8, 2022

The ancient picture of the shepherd and his sheep still touches the hearts of 21st century believers. The mighty risen Lord is also the gentle shepherd who protects his sheep from the evils that surround and attack them. We have come to know his love, and so we hear his voice.

Sermon Psalm 23

The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. 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. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

If you page through the Bible, you'll find a lot of sheep. And wherever you find sheep, you'll almost always find shepherds. There were a lot of sheep in Israel in Bible times, so it makes sense. But sheep weren't the only animals that Bible people knew about. There were just as many goats as there were sheep. There were plenty of donkeys, too. Lions are extinct in Palestine today, but back in Bible times lions were everywhere. But when David wrote Psalm 23, he didn't write "The Lord is my goat herder." And in today's Gospel Jesus didn't say "I am the good donkey trainer." And no artist has ever drawn a picture of Jesus holding a baby lion in his arms.

When the Bible wants to describe people—people like you and me—the writers almost always use the picture of sheep. People are more like sheep than goats or donkeys or lions. Goats are climbers; they can climb up a mountain and get themselves back down. Sheep are grazers; when they get into dangerous places, they're stuck—just like us. Donkeys are workers; they'll carry a load for days without food or water. Sheep just stand around and eat and when they eat too much, they bloat up and die—just like us. Lions attack with stealth and speed. Sheep turn and run and usually end up as lunch for the lions—just like us. We can't think of ourselves as goats or donkeys or lions. If we're going to appreciate our shepherd, we have to see ourselves as sheep.

King David grew up as a shepherd. He knew all about sheep and he knew about shepherds, too. As a king, David also knew about people and he knew about himself. What David knew best was the truth about the Lord. So when King David wrote Psalm 23, he was writing from experience. He was a sheep, he was a shepherd, and he trusted the Lord. It was easy for him and it was natural for him to write, **The Lord is my shepherd. I lack nothing.**

King David knew something else. He knew off in the future his Shepherd Lord would take on a different look and a different form. In other psalms he wrote, David could see this Shepherd suffering and dying and rising and conquering. So David would not have been surprised to hear Jesus say, **I am the Good Shepherd. I lay down my life for the sheep.**

On this Good Shepherd Sunday we are going to remember and review the words David wrote in Psalm 23. Many of us know these words by heart. And we are going to hear about our Shepherd not only as the Shepherd Lord David knew, but also the Good Shepherd that David prayed for. 3000 years ago King David envisioned what we believe today:

The Lord Jesus Is the Shepherd of the Sheep

He preserves us. He protects us. He prepares us.

1. Some people say sheep are stupid, but they're not. From what I read, sheep recognize their mothers and siblings; they know the voice of their shepherd and even the bark of the sheep dog. But when it comes to finding food and water, they're dumb as stones. On their own they'll eat the wrong kind of grass and take way too many chances to get to water.

We all, like sheep, have gone astray; each of us has turned to his own way. David didn't write those words—Isaiah did—but David could have written them. In so many ways you and I are like the two-year-old who runs into a busy street to chase a ball. Looks like fun. Right. It's not that we're stupid; some of us are really smart. The problem with us is sin. Sin isn't a nice thing to talk about on Mother's Day or when visitors are in church, but we can't understand Psalm 23 without talking about sin. Sin is that thing that lives in all of us that leads us to do exactly what the Lord doesn't want us to do. Mom says, "Don't run into the street" and the two-year-old looks at mom with a defiant grin and runs toward the street. We're sure to get hit and the hit might be hellish. David understood this. He wrote in Psalm 32: **Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.**

The Lord is my shepherd; I lack nothing. Our shepherd is not some far-off force we see only in pictures. Each of us can say that the Lord is **my** shepherd and I lack nothing. Jesus came to our world for everyone, but he also came to my world for me. Jesus came to solve my sin problem by dying and rising again and now he takes me to places that are safe. He walks with me and he talks with me in his Word. It's in the Bible where **he makes me lie down in green pastures** where I won't be poisoned. **He leads me beside quiet waters** where I won't drown. When I sin and get myself in trouble, **he refreshes my soul.** You might say he catches me on the sidewalk, turns me away from the road, and points me back to safety. **He guides me along the right paths.** He leads me on paths that he walked in my place, paths that were right and perfect, and on those paths I find forgiveness and guidance. He does all this **for his name's sake.** If Jesus is going to call himself the Good Shepherd, he is not going to stop being the Good Shepherd. His reputation is on the line and so he means what he says. ***The Lord Jesus is the shepherd of the sheep and he preserves us in his perfect love.***

2. I'm sure King David knew. To this day the hills around Palestine are filled with deep ravines and sharp cliffs. More than once his sheep would have taken chances like their goat friends. But the sheep weren't goats and death was one misstep away.

David knew personal ravines and cliffs, too. He fought bears and lions as a shepherd. If his sling shot would have been five inches wide of Goliath's head, it would have been David who was dead. David knew what it meant to **walk through the valley of the shadow of death.** He had been there.

And so have we. Psalm 23 isn't just a psalm for funerals, even though that's where we usually hear it. But dangers come into our lives in ways that are different from death: the disappointment of a broken relationship, the disaster of a financial collapse, the disease that won't heal. We have plenty of dark times in our lives and they hang over our heads like gloom and doom. But when Jesus is our Good Shepherd, we can say with David, **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.** The Lord doesn't always take trouble away but he uses the rod of his love and the staff of his wisdom to guide us and push us along. St. Paul wrote, **We know that in everything God works for the good of those who love him.** Death comes to all of us, of course, but Jesus guides us through the valley and the shadow and he brings us to the brilliant banquet of victory. ***The Lord Jesus is the shepherd of the sheep and he protects us with his perfect power.***

3. David is done with sheep. Where David set his sights at the end of Psalm 23 is that brilliant banquet of victory. He's seen his Shepherd Lord in action throughout his life and he joins that vision to the Good Shepherd he knows is coming. And so David sang **You prepare a table before me.** This is an Easter feast where **the Lord swallows up death forever.** Sin and society and Satan still surround us and still attack. I often feast with Jesus **in the presence of my enemies** and so do you. But the Good Shepherd promises that **no one will snatch us out his hand.** Jesus Christ lived and died and rose

again so he could treat us like royalty. He washed our sins away in his blood, he wraps us in the robes of his righteousness, and he calls us by name. And so we say, **You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.**

If you start counting words from the beginning of Psalm 23 and at the same time start counting words from the end of Psalm 23, these are the words you'll find exactly in the middle: **For you are with me.** In a world of sadness, uncertainty, and suspicion, in a society where Satan and sin seem out of control, our Shepherd Lord, our Good Shepherd, wants us to be certain of this: **Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life.** Do you wish you could be more certain? Do you want the doubts to dissolve and the dread to disappear? Then do what David did: **I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.** The Savior's Word is where we find his promises and his Word is where we find our faith. Jesus said, **My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish.** Brothers and sisters, dwell in the Lord's house now and you will dwell in the Lord's house forever. ***The Lord Jesus is the shepherd of the sheep and he prepares us for the perfect pleasures of paradise.*** Amen.