

A Easter 4
13 April 2008

“Jesus Is My Shepherd”
Psalm 23

He is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! And the risen, living Lord is our Good Shepherd. This is Good Shepherd Sunday. Our text is the Shepherd Psalm, Psalm 23.

My little car, my 20 year old Toyota Corolla is running fine, thank you very much! The *radio* has issues. It predates CD's, so I don't have a CD player. The tape player ate so many tapes that it no longer works. The FM part of the radio doesn't work. And the AM part of the radio is stuck on one station. So if I'm driving in the morning I get to Tony Kornheiser, and Glen Beck in the afternoon. I'm sure some of you agree with Glen Beck and some of you disagree with him. He is convinced that we are on the cusp of a total economic collapse. It's coming and it's coming soon. Our investments will evaporate, our money will be worthless. So he's suggesting you liquidate all your assets and stockpile the stuff you won't able to buy when money becomes worthless – food, shoes, winter coats, fire wood and so on. That kind of *stuff* will provide you security when the crash comes.

King David lived almost 3,000 years ago, and he lived through some pretty turbulent times. For most of his reign as King he was beset by enemies “both foreign and domestic”. King David weathered all those storms because he found his security in God. He articulated that faith in what has become one of the most beloved passages of Scripture, the 23rd Psalm:

- ¹The LORD is my shepherd;
I shall not be in want.
- ²He makes me lie down in green pastures
and leads me beside still waters.
- ³He revives my soul
and guides me along right pathways for his name's sake.
- ⁴Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil;
for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
- ⁵You spread a table before me in the presence of those who trouble me;
you have anointed my head with oil, and my cup is running over.
- ⁶Surely your goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

King David saw his God as a Shepherd, a good Shepherd who provides him everything he needs, and so there was no need to be frightened or anxious as he faced the future.

King David believed in a Good Shepherd who provides green pastures. I understand that to mean all of the physical necessities we need to keep body and soul together: food and clothing, shelter, family and friends. People who protect us. People who take care of us. Everything I need to survive and thrive in the world.

Jesus is our Good Shepherd and tells us not be anxious about what we will eat, what we will wear for God will supply all our need:

Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you

by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. If God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you. Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ ...your Heavenly Father knows you need all these things.

King David believed in a Good Shepherd who guided him to still waters and restores his soul. God offers us peace and tranquility in the midst of all the turmoil of life. God can give us wholeness of spirit, a sense that my life makes sense even when all my roles and responsibilities tug me in a hundred different directions. “Come to me”, Jesus says, “all you who labor and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. I will be your rest.” Jesus is our Sabbath, our rest from the turmoil of life and the assaults of the Evil One. Jesus, by his dying in our place, gives us rest from the burden of our sins.

King David believed in a Good Shepherd who would guide him in the paths of righteousness. For me that phrase points to the need deeply rooted in every human heart to be in touch with something transcendent, something “out there”, something bigger than ourselves. Has there ever been a human society anywhere that did not create and practice some kind of religion, sought some way to be in touch with the Divine? Today even people who say they have no religious impulse seek some issue, some cause that gets them outside of self-interest be it saving the whales or rebuilding New Orleans or just being part of a “club scene” week after week. We all have a need to be in touch with something bigger than ourselves.

“I am the Way, the Truth and the Life”, says Jesus. The Way back to God who is the Creator and bigger than life itself. The Truth about what this is all about and what is my place in it. The Life that has no end for Jesus opens the door to relationship with God.

King David believed in a Good Shepherd of whom he could say “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.

We all walk in the shadow of death. Few of us maintain the illusion that we are invincible, immortal. We exercise care and caution as we go about our day to day routines because we know life can be taken from us in a second. Most of the families in this congregation are wrestling with significant health issues – either you or someone who is near and dear to you. If no one close to you is struggling with a significant health problem, count yourself blessed – you are in a small group indeed!

Our children are at risk. Just two weeks ago a young man was murdered at Parkdale high school. That’s in our neighborhood. And the suspected perpetrators live just a few blocks from here. Parents are rightfully concerned and frightened for their children.

We walk in the shadow of death, but do not loose heart, for Christ is with us. “I am with you always”, Jesus said. In every circumstance of life, in every adversity we face, Christ is with us.

“I am convinced,” St. Paul wrote to the Romans, “that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in X Jesus our Lord.” And if nothing can separate us from God’s love in Christ, then there is nothing that we need fear about the future.

King David believed in a Good Shepherd who sets a table for him even in the presence of enemies, and at that Divine banquet, the Lord anoints his head with oil fills his cup to overflowing and fills his life with goodness and mercy. It’s interesting how in the middle of this most beloved Psalm David switched his metaphors from “God is a shepherd and I am his well cared-for sheep” to “God throws a lavish banquet and I am his honored guest.” The metaphor may be mixed but the point is clear: God claims me and affirms me even when I am surround by people who may not like me, who may be out to get me or do me in. I may not be popular – but God still claims me as his own and fills my cup to overflowing with goodness and mercy.

I am Jesus’ little lamb. He claimed me right there at the baptismal font. In front of a whole crowd of people – some of whom thought I was cute and adorable and some of whom thought I was that cranky Hedt baby – in front of a whole crowd of people Jesus claimed me and named me and became *my* shepherd. My **Good Shepherd**. My cup of blessing has been filled to overflowing many times over. And while life has had it bumps, I know that God’s goodness and mercy have always been part of my story. The Good Shepherd claims and names you, too!

King David believe that he had a place in God’s house forever. “In my Father’s house there are many rooms,” Jesus says, “and I go to prepare a place for you.” Our Good Shepherd promises to come back for us, to find us wherever we may be, even if it is in the clutches of death – he will find us and take us to that place where we will dwell with God forever.

We cannot know what the future holds. It may be peace and prosperity. It may be more violence and destruction and warfare. There may be a global economic collapse. I may face good days and bad days, health or sickness.

No matter. You and I can face the futre with confidence and hope. Jesus is our Shepherd. Jesus is a Good Shepherd who is always with us. We have everything we need.

He is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!