



Easter 4

May 7, 2017 - 10:15 a.m.

Rev. Todd Goldschmidt, Pastor

Theme: The King of Love My Shepherd Is!

Sermon Text: Psalm 23 (NIV)

A psalm of David.

¹ The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,

³ he refreshes my soul.

He guides me along the right paths
for his name's sake.

⁴ 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.

⁵ You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

⁶ 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.



Today is the fourth Sunday of Easter—a Sunday that’s historically been designated on the liturgical calendar as “Good Shepherd Sunday.” The picture of the Messiah as a good shepherd for God’s people dates back thousands of years. The prophet **Micah** was inspired by God’s Spirit to predict that the Messiah would be born in “**Bethlehem**.” He went on to say of Him: “**He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth**” (5:2 & 4). David shepherded his father Jesse’s flocks before the Lord chose him to secede Saul as Israel’s 2nd king. The prophet Samuel anointed him with oil to consecrate him for that extremely important calling. When it comes to shepherd’s duties and responsibilities, David was blessed with the unique perspective of someone who’d served faithfully in that role. Perhaps that’s why God moved him to pen the 23rd Psalm. On this “Good Shepherd Sunday,” we rejoice with David—Israel’s shepherd-king—as we proclaim with him:

The King of Love Is My Good Shepherd!

Few would argue the fact that out of 150 psalms, Psalm 23 is the most familiar. It beautifully depicts the loving care and concern Jesus has for each one of us as He graciously gives us everything we need for our physical and spiritual well-being. This precious Old Testament song of praise can be divided into three stanzas. The first is a delightful depiction of Christ. The second is an intimate conversation with Him. The final coda is a strong confession of faith in Him as Lord and Savior.

David sings, “**The Lord is my shepherd**.” But who is “**the Lord**”? What’s He like? Does He have adequate credentials to be “**my shepherd**”—my manager—my owner? And if so, how do I come under His control? How do I become the object of His loving concern and diligent care? These are penetrating, searching questions that deserve a whole-hearted examination. One of the calamities of Christianity is our affinity to talk in ambiguous generalities. David, the inspired author of this poem, came to be known as Israel’s “**Shepherd King**.” So who does David say is his “**shepherd**”? The “**Lord**.” Jehovah Himself; the Lord God of Israel; the God of the covenant. Jesus, who rightly claimed “**I and the Father are one**” (John 10:30), endorsed this statement in our Gospel Lesson, avowing: “**I am the good shepherd**” (John 10:11 & 14). So if we’ve been led by God the Holy Spirit to put our hope and trust in Jesus as the Lord of our life and our Savior from sin, we can confidently proclaim along with King David of old, “**The Lord**”—*the King of love*—“**is my [good] shepherd!**”

Jesus is the good shepherd about whom Isaiah prophesied, “**He tends his flock like a shepherd; he gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those who have young**” (40:11). He’s the Lord about whom God the Father led Zechariah to write: “**‘Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is close to me!’ declares the LORD Almighty. ‘Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered, and I will turn my hand against the little ones’**” (13:7).

Sunday Worship Service: 10:15 A.M. (Sunday School/Adult Bible Study 9 am)

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Page 2 of 5



At Jesus' crucifixion, His disciples scattered like rats leaving a sinking ship and blockaded themselves in an upper room. But Jesus, their risen Lord, "came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!'"

When "he showed them his hands and side," they saw the wounds from the spikes and spear that had pierced His flesh, and they "were overjoyed" (John 20:19-20)! This same risen Jesus is our Lord and Savior, too! He's the One about whom the inspired writer of the book of Hebrews states: "Because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save forever those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them" (7:24-25). Jesus goes before the heavenly Father's throne, showing Him, too, the indelible marks in "His hands and side" that prove His undying love for us. "My body, Abba, Father, bears the sacred scars of my all-sufficient sacrifice for the sins of all people. We've assured *my* precious sheep who follow me that I paid the full ransom price for every single one of their sins, not just the down payment on their loan! I rose to life, that they, too, might live!"

Jesus was David's "Lord" and His ever-gracious "shepherd" through the storms of this life! And He's our "Lord" and "shepherd," too! With David we sing, "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." But we have to *let* Jesus "guide" us "along the right paths for his name's sake." In His Word, He reveals the way to go; He directs, corrects and trains us. But not if we harden our hearts, resist His Spirit or grow complacent in our walk of faith. An unfed faith is an anemic faith. It produces far less good fruit than God seeks from His blood-bought children. And it puts us in grave jeopardy of losing our eternal inheritance. The King of the universe freely suffered and died for us so that we could be reconciled to the Father; He endured unspeakable pain to ensconce us in heaven! With grateful hearts, we live for Him in the certain assurance that the Father "who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all" will "also, along with him, graciously give us all things" (Rom. 8:32).

The way to heaven leads through dark valleys and deeply-gouged gorges of pain, heartache, disappointment and despair where there is no sun, no star of hope and death and destruction lie in wait to swallow us whole. That's when we dig deep into the treasure trove of God's Word, searching until we find that one lifeline for our faith that we can cling to; that one ray of hope that breaks through the clouds that engulf us. We hear God say to us through His prophet Isaiah, "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior" (43:1b-3a). Like the children of Israel at the Red Sea and the Jordan River; like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in King Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace, we know that our Good Shepherd is with us "Even though [we] walk through the valley of the shadow of death." He'll never leave us or forsake us!

And so we come to the closing coda of the 23rd Psalm in which we join David in confessing our faith in our "Good Shepherd" with tremendous confidence! We sing to Him, "You

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Page 3 of 5



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.”

Our great and gracious Good Shepherd has a celebration meal with us not after we finally get out of the dark valley but in the middle of it—“in the presence of [our] enemies.” He wants us to rejoice in Him in the midst of our troubles. Is Jesus, our Shepherd, that out of touch with reality? Hardly. Jesus is the only Shepherd who knows what it’s like to be a sheep (John 10:11). He understands what we’re going through, because He underwent the same kind of suffering and endured the exact same temptations that we struggle with on a daily basis. Perhaps with the closing words of Psalm 23 in mind, the Spirit inspired to Apostle Paul to conclude chapter 8 of his missive to the Romans with some of Scripture’s most encouraging words:

No, in all [of life’s difficulties], we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (vv. 37-39)

With Jesus, the King of Love, as our Good Shepherd we have nothing to fear—not even the day of our death! Nothing—“in all creation”—can wedge us away from God’s love. Nothing! So join me in speaking the final words of Psalm 23: “I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever”! One more time: “I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever”! One last time: “I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever”! Yes, you will—and so will I! **We** will dwell in the house of the Lord forever and ever all thanks to Jesus, the King of Love, Who is and always will be our great Good Shepherd! Amen.



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