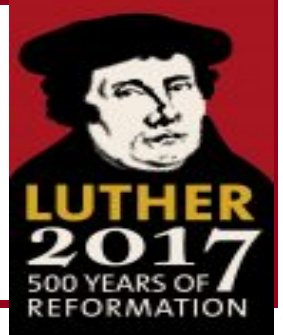


The Good Shepherd

Psalm 23 John 10:1-16

April 2, 2017

Pastor Dave Bolte



The Lord is my Shepherd¹, I shall not want.

Most likely you are somewhat familiar with Psalm 23. Perhaps you even have it memorized --- it's only six verses long. Psalm 23 has been referred to as the “**Pearl of the Psalms**” because of its beauty, its promises, and its comfort. If you are like me, you get a little *snobbish* about Psalm 23: it has to be read in the King James Version otherwise it just isn't the same! 😊

Psalm 23 is frequently used at funerals because of the immense comfort it offers. **It is a statement of faith in the Good Shepherd. Jesus is the Good Shepherd.** Psalm 23 teaches us that Jesus cares, He watches over us, He gives us peace, and He strengthens us. Psalm 23 teaches us that because of the Good Shepherd, *“goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our lives: and we will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.”*

The tremendous comfort we get from Psalm 23 can be seen in three areas.

The Good Shepherd Calls Us to Follow Him

The only way we can recognize Jesus as the Good Shepherd is because He has called us to faith. **In Holy Baptism, the Good Shepherd called you by name to His flock;** and now you follow him throughout your life. Jesus describes “following him” as **listening to His voice.**

“The sheep hear His voice, and He calls His own sheep by name and leads them out. When He has brought out all His own, He goes before them, and the sheep follow Him, for they know His voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” JOHN 10:3-5

The voice of Jesus is emphasized; the voice of Jesus is the Word of God.

In fact, that is why we call the Bible **the “Word” of God:** they are the **very**

¹ The Latin translation of the word “shepherd” is *pastor*. Jesus is our perfect, divine Pastor who leads, defends, and feeds us throughout our lives. Both Scripture lessons today emphasize that point. Modern day “pastors” are referred to in such a way based on verses such as these: John 21:15-17, Acts 20:28, Ephesians 4:11, 1 Peter 5:1-2. They're *under-shepherds* of the Good Shepherd!

words of God; the Bible is the **voice** of the Good Shepherd in your life. When you hear and obey the Word of God, then you are hearing the Good Shepherd's voice and following Him.

The **warning** Jesus gives is that there are *other voices: A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.* JOHN 10:5 Jesus is warning us about following the *ways of the world*, and *false teachers*, both of which lead you away from the Good Shepherd. This is Jesus' way of saying that it is very important that you are biblically literate and doctrinally sound.

Jesus teaches us that we are to **learn to recognize His Voice**. The only way that happens is when you spend time in His Holy Word: hearing, reading, learning, studying, and memorizing Holy Scripture. There is no other way. ***When you hear and obey the Word of God, then you are following the voice of the Good Shepherd.***

A sheep must live entirely by its shepherd's help, protection, and care. As soon as it loses him, it is surrounded by all kinds of dangers and must perish, for it is quite unable to help itself. MARTIN LUTHER

When you hear and obey the Word of God, then the Good Shepherd leads you to live a peaceful life. The emphasis in Psalm 23 is that the Good Shepherd will lead you to live a **peaceful life**. *The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.* Both "**lying down in green pastures**" and "**still waters**" imply **peace**:

- † first, that you have **peace with God** through Jesus;
- † and then as far as it depends on you, you live at **peace with other people**.

When you hear and obey the Word of God, then you will live peaceful lives.

The Good Shepherd calls you to follow Him you as you hear His voice in Holy Scripture, obey it, and live a peaceful life.

The Good Shepherd Defends Us From Evil

Not only does the Good Shepherd lead you, but He defends you from evil. *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.* “You fear no evil” because the Good Shepherd laid down His life for you. That is how He defends you and saves you: **the Good Shepherd laid down His life for you!** Here is how Jesus taught it:

I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. JOHN 10:11-13

In this salvation image, **the danger are the wolves**. In this metaphor, salvation is seen as Jesus the Good Shepherd standing between you and the wolves. The wolves are sin, guilt, the devil and even the valley of the shadow of death. Jesus defends you by laying down His life for you. He put Himself in harm's way to save you.

That happened when Jesus suffered and died on the cross for you. Jesus' suffering and death is pictured a fierce battle between the Good Shepherd and the wolves. **The wolves are vicious, they leave the Good Shepherd betrayed, arrested, beaten, spit on, flogged, and finally crucified with agonizing pain. The wolves kill the Good Shepherd.**

Yet, this is exactly how the Good Shepherd defends the sheep, and overcomes the wolves. Jesus the Good Shepherd was on the cross for you. He stood between you and danger.

- † He was punished with the Wrath of God for your sin and guilt.
- † When Jesus died, the devil's head was crushed!
- † On the cross, the Good Shepherd stood between you and the wolves.
- † Everything He went through, you should have gone through.
- † He laid down His life for you, and now you are safe;
- † in His Resurrection from the dead, you have life and peace and eternal salvation!

Because Jesus, the Good Shepherd, laid down His life for you, you will *dwell in the house of the Lord forever!*

The Good Shepherd Feeds Us

Finally, not only does the Good Shepherd call you to follow Him, and defend you from evil, but **He also feeds you eternal food**. *Thou preparest a **table** before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my **cup** runneth over.* The Good Shepherd provides eternal food and drink for you in the Lord's Supper. He has prepared this table for you where He is both Host and Food. The Good Shepherd gathers His sheep together and feeds them holy food – the holy Body and the holy Blood that He shed on the cross for the forgiveness of your sins. When you “**take and eat**” and “**take and drink**”, God is *anointing your head with oil and your cup runneth over* with mercy, goodness, forgiveness, life, and salvation!

At this table, in this life, the Good Shepherd *restores your soul: he leads you in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. At this table, He promise that you will dwell in the House of the Lord forever!*

At this table, we are reminded that a time is coming, and coming soon, when the Good Shepherd will gather together **His entire flock** of all believers of all times and all places and He will feed us at His eternal Table in the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Good Shepherd ultimately is leading us, defending us and feeding us so that we will be with Him forever in the Kingdom of Heaven!

When you think of sheep, remember that they are not wild animals. **They are animals that are dependent on their owner. We are dependent on the Lord Jesus.** *Jesus is our Good Shepherd.* You belong to him, and He leads you, He defends you, and He feeds you. No wonder, that with confident faith, we boldly confess:

**The Lord is my Shepherd,
I shall not want!**

Amen!