

“The Good Shepherd”

May 3rd, 2020 Covid 7
John 10:11-16, Psalm 23

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Psalm 100:3

“Know that the Lord is God. It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.”

John 10:11-16 The Voice

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep in His care. The hired hand is not like the shepherd caring for His own sheep. When a wolf attacks, snatching and scattering the sheep, he runs for his life, leaving them defenseless. The hired hand runs because he works only for wages and does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know My sheep, and My sheep know Me. As the Father knows Me, I know the Father; I will give My life for the sheep. There are many more sheep than you can see here, and I will bring them as well. They will hear My voice, and the flock will be united. One flock. One shepherd.

If you have internet please watch this video called
Psalm 23 and Me <https://youtu.be/doh379tdawQ>

“The Good Shepherd”

Jesus gives a number of “I Am” statements in the gospels: I am the vine, I am the gate, I am the bread of life, I am the way, the truth and the life... One of the best known and greatest images of Jesus is “I am the good shepherd”.

Part of the reason it’s such a strong image is because of the 23rd Psalm, *The Lord is my Shepherd*, which is probably the best-known and

loved passage of scripture. Even though it is in the Old Testament and written thousands of years before Jesus was born, as Christians we put those images together and very much bring Jesus into that Psalm. As Christians we read the whole Bible through our Jesus glasses.

Like so many of the images of the Bible they are set in a particular culture and time and space and would have been very familiar and understood by those who wrote the verses and those who heard the stories.

I don't know about you but my first-hand experience and knowledge of sheep is limited. Once upon a time we owned pigs and chickens and a horse when we lived in Stavely, Alberta; but never did we raise any sheep. The Agriculture Society in Canada put out a fact sheet for people getting into the business of tending sheep, "Understanding Sheep Behaviour." Here are some things they mention.

- Sheep by nature are followers; let them follow and don't drive them as you would cattle.
- Sheep have good memories; these memories need to be positive ones as much as possible. (Apparently, they can remember up to 50 individual faces for up to 2 years and will remember if that face was a positive experience or negative.)
- Sheep like routine, so be patient when introducing something new.
- Sheep react negatively to loud noises and yelling.
- Sheep move best when not afraid, so work slowly and calmly.
- Sheep have no depth perception, so shadows, dark surfaces and water are an issue.
- Sheep will move towards other sheep.
- Sheep are social animals, so try and prevent seclusion.

Psalm 23 is attributed to King David and you may remember that King David himself was a shepherd. While all his older brothers are in the army David, the youngest, is in the hills tending sheep. He understood exactly the role of a shepherd and so it is interesting that he writes it from the vantage point of being a sheep who needed a shepherd to guide and protect him.

The truth is we all need a good shepherd. We are all vulnerable at times in our life. I think many of us have been feeling that way lately. Even though most of us really know very little about sheep we get the reason why we are compared to sheep in the bible. One of the things that sheep hate is to be alone. They want to be part of their flock.

We've been in isolation now for 7 weeks and it just feels unnatural and makes us feel vulnerable. We do indeed have something in common with sheep. But if those sheep for some reason really did need to be separated, I think the one thing that would help them feel less vulnerable would be if the shepherd was there with them. The shepherd who cared for them day in and day out and called them by name – the one whose voice they recognized – if the shepherd was with them that would make a difference.

The interesting thing is that even though you almost never see a sheep on its own – when you read the 23rd Psalm – I don't know about you but I only ever picture one solitary sheep with the shepherd. The Lord is 'my' shepherd. I know that the Lord is 'our' shepherd but there is something comforting to know that he's not just the shepherd to everyone but for me. For you.

In the end though we share experiences with others, we walk this journey of life on our own. I think that's why the 23rd Psalm is so well loved. It is honest about the fact that the journey of life is not always easy and that we are so very often vulnerable. There are times when it is harsh and frightening.

The end of Psalm 23 says: "*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*"



The house of the Lord is not the mansion in the sky but a sense of belonging to a house—to a tribe. Remember that Jesus was from 'the house of David'. This means that we are members of God's family and that we belong. You belong.

Have you ever been somewhere and thought "I don't belong here"? Maybe you feel that right now. You need to know deep down that you belong to the House of God. There is no greater house, tribe or family. The *goodness and mercy* are the translation of the Hebrew word *Hesed* which is that strong love, covenantal love of God. *Hesed* is an unshakable,

unfailing love – there is no where you can go and nothing you can do that will break that rock-solid love of God for you and it doesn't just follow you. *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.*

I've learned that 'follow me' is a bit of a weak translation and it is a strong love that will *pursue* you all your life.

The 23rd Psalm speaks of God's presence. The greatest gift we can have is the sense of the presence of God throughout our days.

If I like a genie could give you one gift it would not be an easy life. It would not be money, it would not be health or long years, it would not be status or power or great talent, it would not even be the end of the Pandemic and a return to "normal life" – If I could give you one gift it would be the presence of God.

The others would be nice too but the thing I value most in my life is the Presence of God. O sure there are times when it takes a dip and times when it is more difficult to feel God's presence; that is normal; but take time to carve out space to feel God's presence.

It will likely involve turning off the news or removing other unhelpful distractions. Do what you can to remove barriers to that presence. The truth is, like the sun on a cloudy day, God's presence never goes away, but sometimes the crap in our life builds up or the heaviness of life moves in and it's hard to experience it.

As much as possible, clear the way and open your heart to that presence: because when you have the presence of God you survive any challenge, you can walk through any valley, you can go to any dark place and bring that presence with you to save others. My prayer is that you would also take on the role of a good shepherd; that you would bring God's presence to others.

My prayer for you today is that you would know God's presence, that you would know that you are not alone. That the Lord, the good shepherd, is here to guide you, to protect you and to restore you, and that you would see the world through the incredible love and justice of God.

Thanks be to God. Amen.