

The Lord is My Shepherd

2018-04-22 - Year B - Easter 4 - The Rev. Christopher M. Klukas

Acts 4:23–37; Psalm 23; 1 John 3:1–10; John 10:11–16

- One of the reasons why psalm 23 is so well loved is because of its personal nature. There are other places in the scriptures where God describes himself as a shepherd. But here, “the Lord is MY shepherd” (V. 1).
- Regardless of how confident some may appear, I think we all have a deep sense of our vulnerability and it is comforting to know that we have a shepherd watching over us.
- Domesticated sheep are truly helpless creatures. Unable to defend themselves, and likely to wander and stray into danger. As we think about God as our shepherd, we should also be thinking of ourselves as sheep, utterly dependent on God.
- In the first four verses, we see three distinct ways in which God watches over us like a shepherd cares for his sheep. Three ways in which we depend on God.

Provider

- V. 1-2
- “I shall not want.” He knows the things that we need and he provides them.
- “Green pastures” and “still waters” These are the things that sheep most need for their health and sustenance.
- Green pastures can be hard to find in Israel. There are a few months of rainy season when things are green, and then they mostly turn brown. Shepherds would need to know where their sheep could find food. They would also have to know what is in the pasture to keep the sheep away from plants that they shouldn’t eat.
- Similarly, shepherds needed to know where to find water for their sheep. The water needed to be clean so the sheep wouldn’t get sick.
- Without a shepherd to provide food and water, domesticated sheep would die in the wilderness.
- God provides for us, too. Sometimes through normative means (work/job). Sometimes through miraculous means (manna from heaven / unexpected gifts or income).

Guide

- God guides us to the good pastures and the good waters, as we have already discussed, but he also guides us in “paths of righteousness” (v. 3)
- Where would we be without a moral compass to guide us?
 - Prov 12:15 “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes...”
 - 2 Timothy 4:3-4 “having itching ears...turn away from truth”
 - Throughout history, we have seen people and cultures do horrific things when they were doing what was right in their own eyes.
- It is these paths of righteousness that “restore my soul.”
- “for his name’s sake.” God is protecting his reputation. When we ask him to guide us, he will always be faithful. He won’t ever steer us in the wrong direction.

Protector

- V. 4 “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death”
 - This could be a “very dark place” or a place where death is threatened.
 - Even though God is our shepherd, there is no guarantee that we won’t sometimes go through scary and dark places. The key here is that we can trust God to bring us safely through.
- “I will fear no evil, for you are with me”
 - God’s presence gives us peace, like the kid who gets picked on at school but knows he is safe when the teacher is there.
- Rod - a short club used for defense against predators.
- Staff - a walking stick used for guiding and correcting the sheep.
 - Both the rod and the staff are seen as sources of comfort. “discipline is security”¹
 - We get antsy where there are too many choices in front of us. It is a comfort to know that we don’t have a moral smorgasbord in front of us. The shepherd has limited our choices, and that gives us peace and comfort, to know that we are on his “right pathways”.

Host

- Verses 5-6 shift away from the sheep/shepherd metaphor and instead present the image of of host inviting us to a feast.
- This feast is spread in the “presence of my enemies” (v. 5).
 - The idea here is a continuation of the comfort expressed in the previous verse.
 - At this banquet, the enemies have no power. Either because they are on the outside looking in while those feasting are surrounded by the protection of the host, or because this is, in fact, a victory banquet.
- Presence at this table is no small thing for this is YHWH’s table.
 - 2 Samuel 9:11 - Mephibosheth dining at the king’s table
 - To be at God’s table is to be under his protection. “goodness and mercy...” (v. 6).
- “Dwell in the house of the Lord forever” (v. 6).
 - The “house of the Lord” refers to the Temple, the dwelling place of God on earth.
 - Forever is most literally translated as “for length of days”
 - When view from a New Testament perspective however, we can see a hint at eternity, dwelling in the new Jerusalem where “the dwelling place of God is with man” (Rev. 21:3) and everything is finally set right as it should be.
 - This is because Jesus identifies himself as the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep (John 10:11).
 - Jesus lays down his life for us, and he take it back up again, so that we can be reconciled to God, so that we can sit at his table, so that we can be adopted as his sons and daughters, and dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

¹ Kidner, Derek. Psalms 1–72: An Introduction and Commentary. Vol. 15. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973.