

Pastor Daniel Waldschmidt – St. John’s Lutheran Church, Burlington, WI – 4/29/2020

Psalm 23 has been a comfort to many different people. It has been a comfort to people who are sick, people who go off to war, people who mourn at a funeral. I read an article from a Christian author and he suggested that this time of the Coronavirus might be the perfect time to hear the message of the Psalms again. Today we are looking at Psalm 23. And this time of the Coronavirus is the perfect time for each one of us to be reminded that **The LORD is my Shepherd.**

Isn’t it amazing how happy and content and optimistic David is in Psalm 23? He says things like **“I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside quiet waters” (23:1-2).** At the end he says, **“Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life” (23:6).** How can David be so happy and content and optimistic?

It’s not that David is naïve. He knows that there will be dark valleys. He knows that he has enemies. He mentions those later in the Psalm. And if you read about the life of David you know that he had plenty of dark valleys and plenty of enemies. And so how can David be so happy and content and optimistic?

He tells us in the very first line: **“The LORD is my Shepherd” (23:1).** The LORD made all the difference for David. The first line of the Psalm is **“The LORD is my Shepherd.”** The last line of the Psalm is **“I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever” (23:6).** When he goes through the darkest valley, he says he won’t be afraid because **“You are with me” (23:4).** David knew that the LORD was going to provide for him and protect him and take care of him just like a Shepherd takes care of a sheep.

David describes how God takes care of us. First, God takes care of physically. **“The LORD is my Shepherd. I lack nothing” (Psalm 23:1).** Many people are facing economic uncertainties because of the effects that the Coronavirus. It’s comforting to know that God is our Good Shepherd who will provide for us.

God has provided for his people in the past. After the Israelites left Egypt they wandered in the desert for forty years. But God provided for them. He gave them manna every morning. Many years later the Israelites prayed, **“You did not withhold your manna from their mouths, and you gave them water for their thirst. For forty years you sustained them in the wilderness; they lacked nothing” (Nehemiah 9:21).** And the same God who provided for his people in the past will also provide for us today.

You can think back over the history of your own life and you can probably think of times when money has been tight, but the LORD still provided for you. The LORD will do that again, because he is your Good Shepherd.

God takes care of us physically. Second, our Good Shepherd takes care of us spiritually. David says, **“He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul” (Psalm 23:2-3).** Can you think of the most peaceful place you have ever been to in your life? Maybe it was a place where you were hiking or camping. It was quiet peaceful and relaxing. Your Good Shepherd takes you to such a quiet peaceful place for your soul, when you hear the voice of your Good Shepherd talk to you in his Word. That **“refreshes your soul” (23:3).**

Your Good Shepherd provides for you physically. He provides for you spiritually. Your Good Shepherd also protects you. David says, **“Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me” (23:4).** We are going through a dark valley right now. Many if not most of us have never been through a valley exactly like this one before. **“Even though I walk through the darkest valley” (23:4).** One of the scary things about the dark is that you can’t see what’s out there. One of the scary things about the Coronavirus is that you can’t see it and so we have to be careful about everything. But as we walk carefully through this valley, our Good Shepherd walks with us. **“Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and your staff, they comfort me” (23:4).**

The sheep are comforted by the Shepherd's staff and rod because the Shepherd uses his staff and rod to fight off predators and protect the sheep. When you go through a dark valley, what is it about the LORD that comforts you? One thing that is comforting about our Good Shepherd is his almighty power. It's comforting to know that God is more powerful than any enemy we could ever face. He's more powerful than the Coronavirus. He's more powerful than cancer. He's more powerful than death. Another thing that is comforting about our Shepherd is that he knows the future. We don't know when this dark valley is going to end. But God does. And he promises to work everything out for the good of those who love him. Another comforting thing about our Good Shepherd is how much he loves us. He loved us so much that he laid down his life for us. He went through the darkest valley of all, so that we would never have to. In the current arrangement of the book of Psalms, right before Psalm 23 is Psalm 22. And in Psalm 22 the Messiah says, "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" He went through the dark valley of being forsaken by God so that we could dwell in the house of the LORD forever. And so when we go through a dark valley, our Good Shepherd can turn to us and say, "I've been through a valley darker than this one. And I did it for you. And every dark valley that you go through I'm going to walk through it with you." And we can look back at him and say, "Jesus, if you're here. I will fear no evil. For you are with me." **Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me" (Psalm 23:4).**

Our Good Shepherd provides for us physically. He provides for us spiritually. He protects us from danger. And finally, he gives us an eternal home.

In verse 5 the imagery of the Psalm changes. The first part of the Psalm emphasizes God as a shepherd providing for us his sheep. The second part of the pictures God as a host welcoming us into his home. I took a class once called Hospitality in the New Testament and it emphasized how important hospitality was in the ancient world. Well, here God welcomes us into his home and spreads out a great banquet before us. **"You prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies" (23:5).** Our enemies are not able to do anything about it.

"You anoint my head with oil" (23:5). In the Old Testament anointing the head with oil was a sign of gladness and joy. Kind of like how we might get dressed up before going to a party. **"My cup overflows" (23:5).** This is a wonderful banquet that God puts before us. The Bible often describes heaven as a joyful banquet.

God's grace is his underserved love. We don't deserve any of this, but he gives it all to us because he loves us. He welcomes us into his home. He sets a table before us. He anoints our heads with oil. Our cup overflows. That's how much God loves you.

No wonder David says, **"Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life" (23:6).** Usually we think of bad things following us. But here it says God's goodness and love are following us! He might allow some difficulty to come into our lives, but even that difficulty he promises to work out for our eternal good. Even that difficulty will serve its purpose in the Good Shepherd leading us to our heavenly home. **"And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever" (23:6).** We're not just a temporary guest in the LORD's house. We are a child in the LORD's house. And the LORD's house is our home.

So what does Psalm 23 have to say to us in the midst of the Coronavirus and its ripple effects? In Psalm 23 God reminds us that he is our Good Shepherd. He provides for us physically. He gives us spiritual rest and refreshment in his word. He walks with us through this dark valley and he brings us to our eternal home.

Psalm 23 has been a great comfort to Christians throughout the centuries and it is a great comfort to us today. It's a great comfort to us because it reminds us that the LORD is our Shepherd and he always will be. Amen.