

3 PENTECOST  
JUNE 24/25, 2017

FIRST, MARSHALL  
PASTOR SCOTT FULLER

PSALM 23; JOHN 10:1-10  
*The Lord Is My Shepherd*

*Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.*

*Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

The phone rang, and an obviously distraught voice said, *Scott, can you come over? My wife miscarried our baby last night... and...we don't know what to do...*

So I went...and we mourned, and we prayed, and we cried,  
and we talked together about hopes that had died.  
Then we planned a funeral and said *good bye*  
to their beautiful dream that never saw the light of day.  
Yet, strangely, somehow, slowly – very slowly – the pain that had so  
defined that dark and depressing night eventually...  
became...bearable in the sight of God's light.



A while ago we heard from a friend who is a pastor. She had just received a call to a new congregation and was trying to make the **right** decision. The new call promised some pleasing possibilities:

- it looked like a match for her spiritual gifts;
- it promised good prospects for her spouse's profession;
- the city seemed well-set with hospitals, schools and homes.

On the other hand, she knew that it would **also** mean saying goodbye:  
To a congregation that seemed to be such a good fit;  
To friends that they cared for and family they loved;  
To a place and people, even problems that were familiar...  
She simply said, *We don't know what to do...*

Last Sunday, Carolyn and I were at Trinity Lutheran Church in St. Peter, Minn., where I preached at the congregation's 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary service. It was a beautiful experience – wonderful for us to see how that congregation has continued to thrive since the tornado of 1998.

So in some ways, it was an emotional experience, reconnecting with people who shared that very traumatic event with us. Lots of conversations helped bring pieces of that day into focus.



It was an unusually warm Sunday in March...  
-the sun was shining  
-the birds were singing  
-people were outside soaking up the warmth of spring's promise...

But then...  
-the sky quickly darkened...  
-soon the rain fell...  
-and the wind began to howl... eventually...  
-the sirens wailed their warning that severe weather was at hand.

So of course, *we* did what **everyone** does when that happens --- we went **outside** to see what we could **see!!!** Before too long, though, those **swirling clouds** sent us back **inside**...then **down** to the **basement**...then **under** the **pool table** in the basement...and finally, those clouds put us *in the dark* – **literally!**

Then after the tornado had done its worst, up the stairs we climbed into a brave new world of grief and loss. We were little prepared for the journey ahead through that valley of dark shadows called: **recovery**.

The **power** plant for the central part of the city was **destroyed**... Very quickly the **temperatures** dropped ...and **just** to prove that things can **always** get **worse** before they get better...the **very next** day...it **snowed!**

One of our congregation's elderly couples was found sitting in their kitchen, the only part of their home not damaged, wrapped in every blanket they owned. Brought to an emergency shelter by their neighbors, they were dazed and confused when I finally found them.

With tears in their eyes, they looked at me and said, *We don't know what to do...*

What a terrible and helpless feeling that is.

A few years ago, I attended a retreat for Lutheran pastors, one that turned out to be a blessing in some special ways. A spiritual director by the name of Jim Christiansen led us through four sessions on the *discipline of prayer*.



Those hours were filled with instances of inspiring spiritual insight and I truly felt blessed to share that experience with my brothers and sisters in ministry.

Then we turned our attention to some critical issues facing the future of the Church – that’s when the hard work began. We were well led through a challenging but fruitful discussion about the problems we were facing, the causes behind them, and the scant resources we had – or didn’t! – to address those concerns.

To say the least, opinions were pointed, pressures were potent, passions were piqued, and, ultimately, God’s promise to preserve us was at least posed as a probability...

But still, by the end of those working sessions, we felt tired, torn, somewhat troubled and tempted to turn it all off. And then, our spiritual director returned, leading us back through a time of prayer before we were to break camp and head off to our busy lives.

Jim opened his bible to II Chronicles 20:12 and started to read these words: We do not know what to do...and that’s as **far** as he **got**, because all of us **pastors** just burst out **laughing** – **not** because it was so **funny**, but because that was **exactly** how **we** all felt.

It turns out that the man who’s praying is actually the ruler of Israel’s nation, King Jehoshaphat of Judah. He and his little army find themselves facing an enemy that is threatening to overwhelm them. The KING prays and begins his final sentence with these words: We do not know what to do...

Unfortunately, we know that feeling well, don’t we? In fact, it’s a universal mark of humanity that under certain circumstances, at a certain time, in a certain place, we will find ourselves entirely uncertain about what to do, when we should do it, and where or how it should be done. Am I right?

There’s no escaping our human limitations, there’s no escaping our frailty before the world, there’s no escaping our sinful inclinations. At various points along our journey through life, we find ourselves like sheep without a shepherd, part of *the last, the lost, the least, the little, the lowly and the lonely*...

*Filled with fear and trembling with trepidation*, the king prays to the Lord: *we do not know what to do*. Yet, he doesn't **finish** his prayer at that point. Instead, he concludes his prayer with these beautiful words: *but our eyes are on you*.



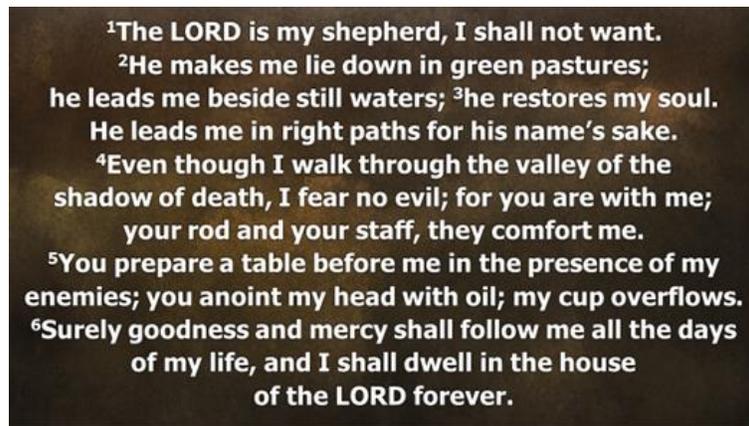
I wish I would have memorized that verse way back when I was a kid. It would have been a great lifeline to cling to during many times throughout my life.

*We do not know what to do...but...our eyes are on you.*

- I can imagine praying these words with our friends who were mourning their miscarriage, *we do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you*.
- I can imagine praying these words with my friend who was agonizing over a new call, *we do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you*.
- I can imagine praying with those who were so confused after the tornado, *we do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you*.
- And I can imagine praying with you, and you with me, when life throws **us** a curve, *Lord, we do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you*.

This is the perfect image of the face of God – Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd. He is the One who provides for our every need, protects us from all dangers, picks us up when we have fallen, and pursues us whenever we wander away. The LORD is my shepherd – and yours!

Let's close by reciting together the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, words that will always help us keep the eyes of our hearts firmly fixed on our good and gracious God.



**<sup>1</sup>The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.  
<sup>2</sup>He makes me lie down in green pastures;  
he leads me beside still waters; <sup>3</sup>he restores my soul.  
He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.  
<sup>4</sup>Even though I walk through the valley of the  
shadow of death, I fear no evil; for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.  
<sup>5</sup>You prepare a table before me in the presence of my  
enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.  
<sup>6</sup>Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days  
of my life, and I shall dwell in the house  
of the LORD forever.**

Amen.