



3 PENTECOST  
JUNE 29, 2014

1<sup>ST</sup> LUTHERAN, MARSHALL  
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PSALM 23; MARK 14:3-9  
*A Vision of Trust*

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

*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.*

Let's read the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm responsively by verse:

*<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 darkest valley,*

*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 my whole life long.*

What a beautiful image of **God's** relationship with **us** –  
it's nothing short of a Garden-of-Eden-like expression of  
***passion for, protection of and provision by***  
the loving Shepherd for the sheep.

-It's a vision for **heaven** –

when death will go down in defeat and all divisions will die;

-it's a vision for **life** –

for when our hearts are hurting, ***and*** when our spirits soar;

-it's a vision for **trust** –

in which we sheep live secure in the promise that God is with  
us in life – ***and*** in death.

Now, I've had a *little personal* experience with **pigs, cows, horses**  
and **pets**, but my knowledge of **sheep** is pretty much out of a **book**.  
The closest I've come to **those** woolly creatures is when Carolyn  
and I visited our daughter, Rachel, who was studying overseas.

We travelled down into the hills of southwestern France and stayed at a Bed and Breakfast...on a **sheep** farm.

The setting was idyllic – it was just outside the picturesque village of La Bastide-Clarence. Every house there has white-washed walls and red-tiled roofs, the **streets** are narrow and winding, and the **smell** of freshly baked baguettes **floats** on the breeze...

...**unless**, of course, the wind is blowing in the *other* direction. In **that** case, one can't help but notice **another** aroma, with a certain **barnyard** bouquet, a **stronger** sort of scent...less fresh and much more potent!

And did you know that sheep like to get up *early* in the morning? We started hearing their *bleats* and *baas* – as our Air Force son would say – at 0-dark-30. One would **start**, soon another would join in, and then quickly we would be serenaded by an entire *sheep opera* as they eagerly awaited the arrival of their 5:00 a.m. breakfast at the hands of the farmer.

These beautiful images of sheep:

-in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm,

-and on that rustic Bed & Breakfast farm – though emotionally wonderful, they can **also** allow us **city** dwellers to **romanticize** this very earthy experience of **producing, providing** for and **protecting** such animals.

**For those who have had *up-close-and-personal* experiences with sheep: What's true about these PEACEFUL images we've mentioned? AND What ELSE should we know about sheep?**

-not self-sustaining, dependent for provisions and protection

-can wander off and get lost

The Bible **also** uses images of this *sadder* side of sheep as well:

-In Isaiah 53 we read, *All we like SHEEP have gone astray...*;

-In Luke 15 Jesus tells the Parable of the Lost Sheep...; and  
 -In Matthew 26, when Jesus predicts his death, he quotes Zechariah 13:7 by saying, *I will **strike** the **shepherd**, and the **sheep** will be **scattered**...*

This same dark theme is woven through a number of popular **fantasy** novels:

-**J.R.R Tolkien**, who is famous for the Hobbit novels, and  
 -**Suzanne Collins** who wrote The Hunger Games.

In these – and many other series – the people in their various countries are **subservient** and **subdued** – ruled by a tyrant who keeps them too tired, too hungry, too afraid to **ever rebel**...they are, indeed, like sheep *without* a Shepherd...

And doesn't that image **also** describe how you and I, and everyone feels at one time or another? **Lost** or **gone astray**, **praying** for **peace**, **hungry** for fellowship or food, **wondering** if we will **ever** be blessed to *be found*, to *be fed*, to *be favored* with the care of the **One** shepherd whom we **dare** to call **Good**?

Take another look at the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm and note the **verbs** that address the various circumstances in life that we all experience.

v. 1 I shall not want – **What do you think the psalmist means by those words: I shall not want?**

I'm thinking it speaks of the sense of **contentment** that *only* comes when we acknowledge God as our true shepherd in life.

In vv. 2 & 3, we rejoice in God's commitment to make us take a Sabbath, take care of ourselves – by taking ourselves out of the craziness of life to rest in God's loving presence.

vv. 4 & 5 assures us of God's power over death and commitment to **protect** us in life, even as he demonstrates the abundance of a love that will not let us go.

The Psalmist then concludes this song with a sense of assurance that God's Spirit **walks** beside us throughout our lives. This gift does two things for us: it gives us the foundation we need to trust that even **death** will not be able to separate us from God's love in Jesus Christ. And **also** it's the foundation for us to live well **right now**. It's what we need to realize our full potential as God's creations, servants of one another.

Author James Herriot, in his delightful book, All Creatures Great and Small, tells a wonderful story from his days as a village veterinarian in Britain. Occasionally he had to deal with some tragic cases, and one day was called to see to a dog that had been horribly mistreated. Chained to the wall inside a filthy shed, he saw the animal lying quietly in the dark and the dirt.

It had been **starved** – the bones of its **face**, **rib cage** and **pelvis** stood out in **sharp** relief. Its hindquarters were covered with **pressure sores**, and its **coat** was **caked** with **feces** and **dirt**. Yet after **examining** the dog, Herriot saw that it had **perfect teeth**, a **good body** and a **strong heart**.

Turning to a nearby policeman, he said *You know, **inside this bag of bones there's a lovely and healthy Golden Retriever. I wish there was some way of letting him out.***

He glanced at the crowd that had gathered and happened to notice a familiar face looking on. There stood Mrs. Donovan, the good natured and nosy town *busy-body*. Just a month earlier, her little dog that was her **constant companion**, had been struck and killed by a car. It had left her **heart-broken** and convinced that she could never bring herself to love another dog.

The vet **saw** her looking intently at the big, bedraggled retriever. He **thought** for a minute, then said to the officer *I'm afraid we'll never find someone who can give this dog all the care he needs. I suppose there's nothing else for it. He's suffered enough...I'd better put him to sleep right away.*

But right **then**, Mrs. Donovan **squeezed** her way inside the shed to look at the dog. She stood silently for a few moments, **obviously** in the grip of a **deep emotion**...then she burst out: *Can I have 'im? I can make him better, I know I can. Please, let me have 'im!*

Three weeks later Dr. Herriot met Mrs. Donovan walking briskly through town – with that big dog on the end of a leash. Writes the vet,

*As she saw me walk over, she stopped and smiled **impishly**, but she didn't speak. I looked down with something akin to awe. The dog was still **skinny**, but he looked **bright** and **happy**, his wounds were **healthy** and there was not a **speck** of dirt in his coat or on his skin.*

*As I straightened up she seized my wrist in a grip of surprising strength and **looked** into my eyes. Then she said, "Dr. Herriot, haven't I made a **difference** to this dog!"*

Thanks be to God that you and I **have-been-and- always-will-be gathered** into God's flock, **given** a feast, **protected** and **provided** for by our Lord and friend, Jesus Christ.

And even **more** than that: this blessing is intended for **everyone** – you and I are **asked**, **encouraged** and **invited**, to ask, encourage and invite **all** people **everywhere** to find their home **with** us in the family of God. God has willed that **all** people are **welcome** in the **house of the Lord**. Think of the **difference** that would make to **their** lives – **and ours!** Amen.