

Sermon – Jane Kilpatrick – St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, Fort Mill, SC
Easter 4B – Good Shepherd Sunday 2021 (Scripture - Psalm 23)

Let us pray. May the message shared be the message needing to be heard, O Lord our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Today is the 4th Sunday of Easter – also referred to as Good Shepherd Sunday. As a Christian Educator, this is one of my favorite Sundays. It is fun helping children understand how sheep and their shepherd are like people and Jesus. Priority one are sheep and life-like environment.

Paper towel rolls, googly eyes, cotton balls, and **lots** of glue to make the sheep. We know that the good shepherd wants the best for the sheep so, from our very own church grounds, we collect rocks, moss, and **lots** of dirt. Now the sheep have a luscious green pasture and a secure sheepfold.

It is not often that I get to allow children to play in the dirt during Sunday school to provide a concept lesson. You; however, understand the concept and my role today is not as the Christian Educator playing in dirt, but the preacher coming before you to talk about one of the most beloved passages in the Bible. It is a responsibility I take seriously as for many, including myself, the 23rd Psalm comes with deeply personal and often emotional connections.

As I began reading the scriptures for today, I was startled that, even with all the meaningful connections I have with this psalm, each time I read it, the psalm sounded more and more like a rote and forlorn collection of words. The dependable and expected feeling of comfort was barely discernable.

I did not understand, and I did not know why. What I did know was that I was disturbed and confused, but mostly I was sad and disappointed. I just sat in my unsettled confusion for a while before deciding I needed to take a break.

When I returned, I went for the two things guaranteed to restore me to the person I recognize. Music and children’s books. I picked up the children’s book containing the lectionary scriptures written for children and published by the Episcopal church. From it I read Psalm 23. The first and last few verses were what I needed.

The Lord is my shepherd and I am the sheep.
I have everything I need.
He takes me to places where I can rest in peaceful, green pastures,
and lay down beside deep, still soothing waters.
He puts new life back into me,
and shows me the right ways to go.

There is nowhere I can go that the Lord's goodness
and mercy isn't already there.
It's like living in the Lord's house.
And that's where I want to be forever.*

Those passages brought me back to the 23rd Psalm I have always cherished and restored the assurance of love, and rekindled the awe we older children of God so desperately need. The words were no longer just those I had memorized as a child when the only thing I thought I understood was, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Of course, at that time, I was probably around 8, I thought the house of the Lord meant our church.

My thought process went something like this... Jesus was my Lord and Savior. Since Jesus was my Lord, then Jesus was The Good Shepherd which explained why there was a painting of him with a lamb around his neck in every Sunday school room in the building. There were nice ladies in the kitchen who were fabulous cooks, there was the man who made sure all the doors were locked in the evening, and there was the beautiful cross in the church and the Good Shepherd stained glass window in the chapel. I had no problem living "in the house of the Lord forever."

As an adult, I have never thought about this psalm without envisioning those paintings. This probably doesn't surprise any Christian. However, Psalm 23 is a Hebrew scripture. Besides all those paintings, why does Psalm 23 feel so Christian? Theologian Michael Lodahl, offers some insight:

"Because this psalm is true **for** Jesus [him] and true **in** Jesus [him], it has become true for us."

I wonder what this psalm meant to Jesus as a boy. Did he think the house of the Lord was the temple?

Then I wonder what this psalm meant to Jesus during the last three years of his life, especially the last three days of his life as he walked through the valley of the shadow of death.

There was a table spread before him in the presence of those who troubled him and his head was anointed with oil. Did Jesus pray this psalm as he struggled up the road to Golgotha to be crucified?

How profound it was for me when I imagined Jesus, Jesus, saying, “The Lord is my shepherd, ...”

Our Jesus was a sheep, too. Think on that for a moment. How did our Jesus experience *his* Lord as *his* shepherd?

The true Jesus, depicted in the paintings from my childhood, as The Good Shepherd has his own Good Shepherd. There are no words to describe the connection created in the moment I realized that Jesus, the Lord who is my Shepherd, stood on this earth and found comfort in saying this psalm to the Lord who is **his** Shepherd.

Jesus lived this psalm and Jesus lives in the house of the Lord forever.

Keep this in mind the next time you hear: “The Lord Is My Shepherd”
Nobody knows de trouble I’ve seen, nobody knows but Jesus,
Nobody knows de trouble I’ve seen. Glory Hallelujah!**

Psalm 23 (*God’s Word, My Voice: A Lectionary for Children* – Lyn Zill Briggs, Church Publishing)

The Lord is my shepherd and I am the sheep.

I have everything I need.

He takes me to places where I can rest in peaceful, green pastures,
and lay down beside deep, still soothing waters.

He puts new life back into me,
and shows me the right ways to go.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I am not scared because the Lord is with me.
And he carries a big stick to chase away wolves,
And a crook to grab me if I fall down a ravine...
That makes me feel better.

When people who make fun of me are watching,
He spreads out a feast in front of them, A feast just for me.
And he anoints me just as a king would be anointed.
My cup is not only full, it is running over the top.
My happiness is complete.

There is nowhere I can go that the Lord's goodness
and mercy isn't already there.
It's like living in the Lord's house.
And that's where I want to be forever.*

Music that brought me peace that day:

** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O977I4bkv-U> –

Nobody Knows de Trouble I've Seen Composer: Harry T. Burleigh Bass-Baritone: William Warfield

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=COiQRI4dUjE>

The Lord Is My Shepherd Composer: John Rutter Choir of King's College, Cambridge

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fRL447oDI4>

Agnus Dei – Composer: Samuel Barber Flemish Radio Choir; Vlaams Radio Koor

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DUtv776aYKo&list=RDGMEM8h-ASY4B42jYeBhBnqb3-w&start_radio=1

Agnus Dei – Composer: Samuel Barber Accentus (French Choir)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jOMnYNLpt7k>

Alleluia Composer: Dieterich Buxtehude Accentus (French Choral group) Philharmonie de Paris

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zhYIZJj6rk>

Gloria Composer: Antonio Vivaldi Director: Antonio Fauró – Vocea Para la Paz (Madrid)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=doJ2Fd6JRpQ>

Jesus Joy of Man's Desiring Composer: Bach Bishop Strotford's College Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NzUMfVpugq4->

Cantique de Racine Composer: Gabriel Faure Monalisa de Lego

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oag1Dfa1e_E

The Mission Main Theme Composer: Ennio Morricone Directed by Ennio Morricone