

Fourth Sunday of Easter 2006

Texts: Psalm 23

John 10:11-18

<http://divinity.library.vanderbilt.edu/lectionary/BEaster/bEaster4.htm>

Psalm 23

This short, memorable psalm is probably the best known and widely read passage of the whole Bible. Attributed to King David who was a shepherd himself in his youth, it is a hymn of quiet, steadfast, assurance and trust.

John 10:11-18

One of the "I am" passages where Jesus invites us to know him as a good shepherd.

Sermon in a Nut Shell

Are you mourning today? Are you spiritually spent today? Are you afraid today? Is death nearby today? David and Jesus are here today inviting us to enlarge our frame and hold our grief, exhaustion and fear in a larger, deeper reality: God provides and guides and protects and restores. Be a good sheep today. Relax. Listen. Drink. Eat. Follow. Live. Live in God's presence, now and for ever.

Sermon Thoughts (Not the Sermon)

Sheepishness

The 23rd Psalm is perhaps the best known and most loved passages in the whole Bible.

Even though they had given up asking us to memorize Bible verses when I went to Sunday School, I can still almost recall the whole of this Psalm from heart – and using the original language of the Bible – the King James: The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want, ...

I wonder how old David was when he wrote this Psalm?

I ask this question, because as a now somewhat older man, I can recall in my youthful enthusiasm feeling similar feelings of confident assurance and trust. I'd had a taste of quiet waters and green pastures. I thought I'd had a taste of enemies and dark valleys.

However, as an older person, I can look back now and see that I had not yet truly faced an "enemy" nor had I walked the valley of the shadow of death.

And so I wonder how old David was when he wrote this psalm? Like all that is good in the Bible we see here that David is not denying the realities that we too experience. Have we here not experienced the valley of the shadow of death? Faced enemies? Feared evils? He is not glossing over them or sugar coating them. But he is placing before us a larger reality, a wider frame in which these hardships may be experienced.

David invites us to reflect on how we are doing in our sheepishness. If the Lord is my shepherd, how have I been doing at being the Lord's sheep?

Can I, do I, recognize the Lord's voice when God calls to me? Do I let myself be led beside still waters? Do I let myself be made to rest in cozy, abundant, nourishing pastures? Is my soul restored? How is my sheepishness?

These passages today are not complicated. They have a pretty simple and direct message for those who will hear: God provides and guides and protects and restores. Stop worrying and hurrying and relax and draw near. Tone down all the other internal voices with their lists of shoulds and coulds and musts, and listen for the voice of God in you, the voice of assuring love in you. Burn the calendar and rest in the Lord. Sit down and let God's blessings pour over you, wash you and restore you. God provides and guides and protects and restores.

And these are not simply words of assurance spoken by those who had it easy; who never faced trials or temptations themselves. David knew what it was like to have to run and hide in fear of enemies. He knew what it was like to mourn the death of a child and the death of a dearest friend. And he knew what it was like to sin: to arrange the death of a trusted servant, to take land that wasn't his.

And Jesus? Well you can either believe that Jesus was so holy that he didn't really mind being tortured and brutally executed, or you can believe that he had so embedded the words of the 23rd Psalm in his heart that he could live what they say: You have prepared a feast for me in the presence of my enemies. Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me ... and I will live with you for ever.

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Be a good sheep today. Relax. Listen. Drink. Eat. Follow. Live. Live in God's presence, now and for ever. This is good news.

Amen.