

The Lamb Who Shepherds: A Good Shepherd Sunday Sermon

Bible Verses Mentioned: John 10, Psalm 23, Revelation 7

Welcome. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, thank you so much for the gift of the Good Shepherd and the one who lays down His life for His sheep. We know His voice and He knows our names. And so we ask that You would sync us up and help us to be aware of Your presence and Your walking with us day by day, never forsaking us and always guiding, leading, and protecting.

And we bless you and thank You. May the preaching of Your Word be Your Word for the sake and glory of Jesus, the good shepherd of the sheep. In His name we pray. Amen. You may have noticed a lot of shepherd themed today. This is called Good Shepherd Sunday, and it actually is a very ancient tradition of the church.

When the early Christians were raising up new disciples and they were teaching them, they had a period called the cuninate or catechizing where they would teach the basics of the Christian faith, the elementary things, to people that wanted to give their lives to Jesus. And they would do this teaching period culminating in Lent, which is that very holy preparatory time of repentance and examination.

And then they would be baptized on Easter Day. And then after Easter, we enter into a phase called the Great Fifty Days, which is where the church would have another set of instructions for those who had just been baptized. And they called that instruction or the mystical teachings.

And what it really fundamentally is about is now we're going to teach you, now that you've been baptized and you have given your life to Jesus, we want to help you to understand what does it mean to really live and walk with Jesus on a daily basis. The goal of the Christian life is not that we would be sort of a one and done. We got our fire insurance and now we can go on with life as usual.

But the whole point of the Christian message and the Christian gospel is that God is reconciling the world to Himself through His Son, Jesus, and that He wants us to be in an intimate personal relationship with Him on a daily basis. And so the church would use Psalm 23 as the teaching tool for a lot of the catechism instructions, and then they would come back to it in the days of the post-Easter for the mystic teachings as well.

So I want to reflect with you on Psalm 23 and think a little bit about it. And I want to do this in the context of Mother's Day too. So happy Mother's Day to everybody. Grateful for all of the moms that are here and grandmothers. And I think we have some great grandmothers too. But it's a glorious day. I love Mother's Day for church because I know that this happens that, you know, the greatest moms will sometimes say the greatest gift that all my children could be would be to sit with me in church.

And they get their husbands and their children all in church with them. I love Mother's Day for that reason. Father's Day is not so much. You know Fathers are like, "What I want for Father's Day is to go fishing or to go play golf." Come on, dads, bring your-- Can you ever imagine a father saying, "I just want my wife and children to sit with me in church on Father's Day." That would be wonderful. But thank you, moms.

And it really actually goes to show something that is very instinctive to mothers, is that mothers are the natural shepherds of their children's hearts. There's a connection with Shepherd Sunday, Good Shepherd Sunday, and Mother's Day, and that moms are supposed to be and are wired to do this to shepherd their children to adulthood and shepherd their hearts.

Now, like earthly shepherds, I'm supposed to be a good shepherd as well. Dads are supposed to be good shepherds when we have employees that work with us. Bosses are supposed to shepherd our employees. Shepherding is something that, in a sense, all leaders are called to, to be

something that is caring for the people in our care. But one of the problems that all human shepherds have, whether we're talking about mothers or fathers or clergy, is that we all fall short of doing a good job.

And I'm aware that even on a day like today, some of us have mother wounds, or we might have hurts from that particular relationship. And it's not always our mother's faults or whatever. It's just that none of us actually can be the perfect shepherd of another person's heart.

And so, part of good shepherding from an earthly standpoint is actually leading and shepherding the hearts of those in our care to find that personal relationship with the great shepherd of the sheep. I mean, that's really the assignment for us as earthly shepherds, is to point towards the great shepherd.

And our work actually is finished when there is a synced up, holy relationship between, say, our children and the Lord. I love the Psalm 23. While it's often read at funerals, it's really a psalm for life. It's a psalm that we should incorporate into every aspect of our thinking about the Lord. The Lord is my shepherd.

I shall not want. You picture little David as a shepherd boy out in the fields, and that had to have been a lonely profession. But we know from the Old Testament stories that David was engaged in that profession as a young, young boy. And while every young boy wants to think of himself as a warrior and a tough guy, there's also a child's heart inside that little body.

And yet here these young boys were sent out into the fields with a whole flock of sheep under their care and responsibility that they were accountable for, like you better bring all those sheep back home with you. And so they had to fight off. And David mentions this. This is one of the reasons why he wasn't afraid to fight Goliath, but they had to fight off bears and lions, and they did it with very simple weapons of slings and rocks and rods and staffs.

And the young boy David, I can just picture this, actually, as he's sitting out there in the fields, probably feeling a little bit nervous and anxious about the situation that he's in. Maybe there was some threat around him. Maybe there was some robbers or some lion growling in the distance or something like that.

But the Lord led him to pin this Psalm in that kind of moment. He's thinking about all the anxieties and the worries of life. He says, "You know what? The Lord is my shepherd. Here I am a shepherd. I'm supposed to be the one in charge, but I'm really just a sheep. I'm really prey. You know I'm out here vulnerable and I could be eaten by the lion.

And David finds his quiet, submissive confidence in recognizing that, yes, I am a sheep trying to be a shepherd, but the Lord is my shepherd. Therefore, I shall not want." And he started to go from there. He's reflecting on his role, but also God's shepherding of his heart and his life.

He says, you know, the Lord makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside the quiet or the still waters. This world is filled with anxieties. All of us face it. I mean, you just turn on the news. I don't think we're made to be watching news 24 hours. And if you're caught up in that, you know it's easy when you're at home to just sit there and scroll through news on your phone or keep the TV running with the news channels.

And if you do that, you're just flooding your heart and your life with the anxieties of the world. I mean, only in our day have we been able to bring all the problems of the entire world right into our living rooms and into our bedrooms as we look at it on the screen or in our mornings.

And so here we're starting or finishing or filling our day with worries about what's happening in Ukraine or what the Democrats and Republicans are fighting over these days or whatever the thing is. And what the Lord wants to do is to lead us beside places of peace.

He wants to take us to the still waters that the green pastures that revive our souls, and if we will allow the good shepherd to do his work in our life, it actually requires a bit of submission on our part with the Lord being our shepherd. We have to claim that posture with him.

There was a saying, you know the Lord helps those who help themselves. So that's not in the Bible. I know some people think it is. I think it was written on some soldiers' swords, but it's not in the Bible. The Lord wants us to be dependent upon Him for our security. He lead us beside green pastures and still waters. He restores my soul.

He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. One of the things that the mysticological lectures teach about Psalm 23, you can read this in ancient church fathers like Cyril of Jerusalem. He says, "When the Lord is guiding us on right pathways, what we're talking about is actually what's taking place in a worship service in the first part of the worship service, which is called the ministry of the Word." It's here that we, from the pulpit and the Scriptures being read and taught, that we're actually being taught the way of the Lord.

The right pathways are being presented before us, and it's on us to be led. Jesus would teach His disciples to obey everything that He commanded. And so, the Good Shepherd is trying to keep us on the straight and narrow of life. And His ways are the best ways because He knows what happens when we get off the right pathways and go down the wrong pathways.

And that's why the Psalmist keeps going. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, what's not on right pathways is the valley of shadow of death. And so the Psalmist says, "Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." See, I have the Psalm 23 memorized in King James, so I just reverted to it the these and thous.

But your rod and your staff, they comfort me. Now, think about what a shepherd's rod and a staff are supposed to do. So the rod is actually what is a weapon or a tool. It's used by the shepherd to ward off the wild animals and to protect the sheep. It also could be used to kind of hit some sheep in the rear end or bonk them upside the head if they need to get back on the right path.

Have you ever had that happen with the Lord as your shepherd where he's had to hit you with his rod a little bit to get you back on the right path? Doesn't feel pleasant at the time, but it produces a harvest of righteousness later is what the Scriptures teach us.

And the shepherd's crook is also not just for the shepherd to have some stability as he's going down these paths and things, but it's also a tool that was used to help fish the sheep out of the little pits and nooks and crannies that they would get caught in and get themselves into trouble, because let's face it, sheep are not the brightest in the world at times.

And sometimes they fall into holes and get themselves caught up in situations that require help, and so do we. And so the rod of discipline, of protection, and the shepherd's crook, the staff, they comfort me because I know that as long as, Lord, as long as you're the one that is keeping me on the straight and narrow.

And yes, I'll accept your correction. I may not like it at the time, but I will. I'll come back. Thank you for pulling me out of the hole when I needed that help to get out of that pit. And so they comfort me when I see those tools in his hand. Then he goes and he shifts gears. This is an interesting thing as Psalm 23 starts with all this shepherd imagery. And then the last two verses, they shift to the metaphor of the king and the king's castle and the king's keep.

And he says this, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies and you anoint my head with oil and put a banquet before me in the banquet table." You see the imagery has shifted from green pastures and still waters to a castle with a keep. But it's not a stingy breakfast. This is not a soldier's rations. This is the king's banquet table.

The Lord honors those who come into His keep as guests to be blessed with His abundance. Psalm or John 10 is the gospel that we read today, where Jesus was interacting with some bad shepherds, the religious leaders of the time.

And they're like, "Would you just tell us if you're the Messiah?" And Jesus says, "Oy, they have told you." I mean, what part of the earlier words that I spoke that are quoted in the chapter did you not understand? Jesus says very plainly over and over again, "I am the good shepherd."

I am the good shepherd. I am the good shepherd." He says it several times. He says, "I am the gate that the sheep enter into the presence of the kingdom of God." He has told them plainly over and over again. And this was the promise of the Scriptures, actually, that when Messiah comes, it would actually be because of the bad shepherds who had been treating the sheep like hired hands and thieves and abusing the sheep and leading them astray and not really truly caring about them.

That when the Lord comes, He will come as a shepherd to shepherd His own people because the people of this world have failed in that task. And so He will come and shepherd the hearts of His people. And you will know that He is the Good Shepherd. And this is what Jesus says. You will know that He is the Good Shepherd by His works, and particularly one great work that He will do.

He says, "I will lay down my life for my sheep." Beautiful picture in the book of Revelation that we also read where it talks about those who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb. These are those who have come out of the great tribulation of this world and this life, and they have finished their race, and they're gathered in a great assembly around the Lord, and they're worshiping the Lamb who was slain.

Then it has this very interesting line at the end of that passage that we read, and I hope you saw it. You can look in your bulletins. It's there. It says, "The lamb will be their shepherd." What a cool thing. We are vulnerable sheep who need a shepherd, but our shepherd came and became vulnerable like a sheep for us in order that he might be our good shepherd, our true shepherd that lays down His life for us and brings us back into that abundant life that He has for us.

The Good Shepherd says, "You know, the thief, he comes to kill and steal and destroy your life." And that's what bad shepherds do in this world. They steal, they kill, they destroy, and yet we keep turning to them all the time over and over again.

And the Lord says, "I have come that you might have life and have it abundantly." I'll end with this, but one of the last things that the mystigological teachings would teach is that the anointing oil of the king's banquet and the overflowing chalice are all pointing to the body and the blood of the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep.

And this banquet that we celebrate as believers in the Lord is the one where we get to share on a weekly basis with our king, a meal that is in the presence of our enemies. You know, this world filled with devils and all kinds of troubles and worries and anxieties.

And yet in here, this is what we call sanctuary, where we get to come and just be with our good shepherd in a safe place and share in the overflowing chalice and the abundant life and grace of His love as His flock.