

The Good Shepherd: A Mother's Day Reflection

Bible Verses Mentioned: Acts 9:36–43, John 10:22–30, Psalm 23, Revelation 7:9–17

Hallelujah, Christ is risen.

Almighty God, to you, all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid. Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Lord be with you. Let us pray. O God, whose son Jesus is the good shepherd of your people. Grant that when we hear His voice, we may know Him who calls us each by name and follow where He leads, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns one God forever and ever. Amen.

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles. Now in Joppa, there was a disciple whose name was Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas. She was devoted to good works and acts of charity. At that time, she became ill and died.

When they had washed her, they laid her in a room upstairs. Since Lida was near Joppa, the disciples who heard that Peter was there sent two men to him with the request. "Please come to us without delay." So Peter got up and went with them, and when he arrived, they took him to the room upstairs. All the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing tunics, tunics, and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was with them.

Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, Tabitha, get up. Then she opened her eyes and seeing Peter, she sat up. He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he showed her to be alive. This became known throughout Joppa and many believed in the Lord. Meanwhile, he stayed in Joppa for some time with a certain Simon, a tanner.

The Word of the Lord.

A reading from the Revelation to John.

I looked and there was a great multitude that no one could count from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne and to the lamb. And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped gods singing.

Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever, amen. Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these robed in white? And where have they come from? I said to him, 'Sir, you are the one that knows.' Then he said to me, 'These are they who have come out of the great ordeal. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

For this reason, they are before the throne of God and worship him day and night within his temple. And the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. They will hunger no more and thirst no more. The sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. The Word of the Lord.

The holy gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to John. Glory to you, Lord Christ. At that time, the festival of the dedication took place in Jerusalem.

It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon. So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the

Messiah, tell us plainly." Jesus answered, "I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me, but you do not believe because you do not belong to my sheep.

My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. The Father and I are one." The gospel of the Lord.

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 Lint, 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 mystigogy 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.

I'm 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. Can 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 soldier's 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 namesake. 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 in 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. 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, "Oye, I 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. Standing, let us affirm our faith in the words of the Nicene Creed found on page 358.

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made of one being with the Father.

Through Him, all things were made. For us and for our salvation, He came down from heaven. By the power of the Holy Spirit, He became incarnate from the Virgin Mary and was made man. For our sake, He was crucified under Pontius Pilate. He suffered death and was buried. On the third day, He rose again in accordance with the scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and His kingdom will have no end. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son, He is worshiped and glorified. He has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy Catholic and apostolic church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen. The prayers of the people follow Form 3. Father, we pray for Your Holy Catholic Church. Grant that every member of the Church may truly and humbly serve you. We pray for all bishops, priests, and deacons.

We pray for all who govern and hold authority in the nations of the world. Lord, on this Mother's Day, we are thankful for the blessing of motherhood and for all the mothers who have had an impact on each of our lives. Please share your mother's name aloud at this time.

Sarah, give us grace to do Your will in all that we undertake. We pray for healing in the lives of Dr. William Madison, Ken Ray, Anna Fordham, Annie McAfee, Carol Bowling Merit, Denise Hudman, Joan Haskell, Sandy Clark, Sarah McCarty, Walden Pope, Jackie Walker, and George Ellis.

Have compassion on those who suffer from any grief or trouble. Give to the departed eternal rest. We praise you for your saints who have entered into joy. O Lord, our God, accept the fervent prayers of your people and the multitude of your mercies.

Look with compassion upon us and all who turn to you for help, for you are gracious, oh lover of souls, and to you we give glory, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen. May the peace of the Lord be always with you.

Good morning and welcome. Again, Happy Mother's Day. And we have a special announcement from a couple of ladies, Anna and Mamie. They are part of the Bowl's chapter of the Angels for Allison Club, and so they're doing a special thing. So I'll let them take it from there. Hello, good morning and happy Mother's Day. I'm Anna Giordano, and this is Mammy Burkett, and we're a part of the Bulls Chapter for Angels for Allison.

And today we're doing a very exciting bake sale on the front patio that will be directly following the service. So please stop by, come get some treats so we can celebrate our wonderful mothers and support Angels for Allison on this special day. Thank you so much. Can't wait to see everyone there. Thank you. An exciting bake sale. Love it. Please do go and buy lots of good things to eat. And then we have a couple of things that are-- Well, one thing that's starting this week, we're starting our Wednesday night study on the resurrected life.

And if you're doing a small group in the homes, we will make sure that those videos are available for you on the website of the church to do that small group study. But if you'd like to come and do it here at the church, we'll be doing it at Wednesday from 6:00 to 8:00 and have table discussions and a little light dinner as well. We also have this Saturday, the gospel corral, will be Saturday, May 5th.

This is one of Jacksonville's treasures, actually. It's led by the music director of St. Philip's Episcopal Church downtown Jacksonville, and they do some really wonderful, powerful music in the African-American tradition. So, I hope that you'll come and support them and be blessed on May 17th, Saturday at 5:00. There are other announcements in here. I hope that you'll take a look, but walk in love as Christ loved us as He gave Himself up for us in offering and sacrifice to God.

Lift up your hearts. Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. It is right and it is a good and joyful thing always and everywhere to give thanks to You, Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth. But chiefly, are we bound to praise You for the glorious resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. For He is the true Pascal Lamb who is sacrificed for us and has taken away the sin of the world.

By His death, He has destroyed death. And by His rising to life again, He has won for us everlasting life. Therefore, we praise You joining our voices with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven who forever sing this hymn to proclaim the glory of your name.

Holy and gracious Father, in your infinite love, you made us for yourself. And when we had fallen into sin and become subject to evil and death, you in your mercy sent Jesus Christ, your only and eternal Son to share our human nature, to live and die as one of us, to reconcile us to you, the God and Father of all. He stretched out his arms upon the cross and offered himself in obedience to your will, a perfect sacrifice for the whole world.

On the night he was handed over to suffering and death. Our Lord Jesus Christ took bread. And when He had given thanks to you, He broke it and gave it to His disciples and said, "Take, eat. This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And after supper, he took the cup of wine.

And when he had given thanks, he gave it to them and said, "Drink this, all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sins.

Whenever you drink it, do this for the remembrance of me." Therefore, we proclaim the mystery of faith. Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

We celebrate the memorial of our redemption, O Father, in this sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, recalling his death, resurrection, and ascension. We offer you these gifts. Sanctify them by your Holy Spirit to be for your people, the body and blood of your Son, the holy food, and drink of new and unending life in Him. Sanctify us also that we may faithfully receive this holy sacrament and serve you in unity, constancy, and peace.

And at the last day, bring us with all your saints into the joy of your eternal kingdom. All this we ask through Your Son, Jesus Christ, by Him and with Him and in Him. In the unity of the Holy Spirit, all honor and glory is yours. Almighty Father, now and forever. And now as our Savior Christ has taught us, we are bold to say, Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

God for the people of God. Take them in remembrance that Christ died for you and feed on Him in your hearts by faith with thanksgiving.

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Let us pray. Almighty and ever-living God, we thank you for feeding us with the spiritual food of the most precious body and blood of your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ, and for assuring us in these holy mysteries that we are living members of the body of Your Son and heirs of Your eternal kingdom.

And now, Father, send us out to do the work you have given us to do to love and serve you as faithful witnesses of Christ, our Lord, to Him, to you, and to the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory now and forever. Amen. At the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds and the knowledge and love of God and His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, and the blessing of God, Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain on you always.

Amen.

Again, I wish you a blessed Mother's Day. As the ladies are leaving, there's a rose gift for each of the ladies, and we hope you'll take one. And then walk in love. No, I'm going to the other.

I went back to the announcements. Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. Hallelujah. Hallelujah.