

Sunday's Sermon

GLORIA DEI LUTHERAN CHURCH

250 Fox Hill Road ■ Hampton, Virginia 23669

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The Lord is My Shepherd

Psalm 23

May the mercy of Almighty God, the love of Jesus Christ, and the peace of the Holy Spirit be with you today. Amen.

If I were to ask you, what your favorite scripture is, what would come to mind? Maybe John 3:16 which talks about the extent of God's love for us. Maybe Jeremiah 29:11 which assures us of God's direction in our lives. Or even Philippians 4:13 reminding us that we can do anything in God's strength.

But where do we turn in times when we have reached our breaking point, or when we find ourselves in a situation that calls for serious and immediate attention. In those instances, we find ourselves relying on another favorite, the 23rd Psalm. It is possibly the Scripture most folk would identify as being one they memorized as a child or a teenager.

Because of its words of comfort and hope, it is the scripture most people want to hear or want to have read at funerals or memorials.

Because of its emphasis on the sufficiency of God, in the early days of Christianity, it was said that it was recited as the newly baptized emerged from the waters.

And it is through this sacred song used in worship, that we see ways in which our God shows His care for us. For many, this Psalm is a song of absolute trust, a song of complete confidence in our God.

Today is Good Shepherd Sunday, and what scripture would be more appropriate to study than the 23rd Psalm. Although Hampton's city surroundings do not offer us what the Psalmist experienced back then, there are elements of this scripture that connect with so many of us.

Psychologist Abraham Maslow, who created the Hierarchy of Human Needs, said that as human beings, we need certain things in our lives to function in a

normal and healthy way. For instance, we need food, water, and shelter. We need to feel loved and that we have relationships with friends and family. We have a strong need to feel safe and secure, a need to feel that someone is always there on our side.

The Eternal is my shepherd, He cares for me always.

The 23rd Psalm speaks of a God who provides us with those same essentials of life that Maslow described. And what evolves is a never-ending relationship.

So, it is useful to look at the 23rd Psalm to discover what a shepherd is and how those principles illustrate the qualities of our Good Shepherd.

Simply put, a shepherd is a keeper of the sheep. Shepherding is a lowly occupation, involving hard work, dangerous work, and modest pay.

But the commitment of a good shepherd to their sheep proves them trustworthy as they provide for the health and welfare of the sheep and guard against thieves and those who would harm their flock.

The shepherd also watches out for strays, for sheep tend to be like social butterflies.

The shepherd's work is accomplished with simple equipment; a rod, which is used to prod and a staff, often used to rescue. And most importantly, the shepherd had to be able to give their life for their sheep.

In biblical times, the term, shepherd, meant more than just a person who was a rugged man, out in some far away land, dressed in a tunic, with a stick of some kind and a bellowing voice attempting to corral a bunch of loud, smelly, and woolly four-legged animals.

The word, shepherd, had impressive qualities that suggested a royal connection, a regal ruler, a shepherd-king. David, who had first-hand testimony about the responsibilities of shepherds, brings to his memory the things he knows and has experienced about God so that in his own life's journey, his heart might be comforted and encouraged.

So, what are the qualities of a shepherd that we can apply to our God in our time and our place?

Since there are so many, I narrowed down the list to **five**:

5. **A Good Shepherd disciplines and corrects His sheep.** God instructs us, teaches us, trains us and directs us in the way He wants us to follow, but He also prods us toward places of service that sometimes, we would rather not go.

4. **A Good Shepherd provides protection and security.**

Whether we are aware of it or not, God is constantly shielding us from harm and danger.

He provides me rest in rich, green fields, beside streams of refreshing water.

He soothes my fears; He makes me whole again, steering me off worn, hard paths to roads where truth and righteousness echo His name.

3. **A Good Shepherd searches out the sheep when they stray.**

It is amazing to know that God actually pursues and seeks to engage us in relationship with Him.

2. **A Good Shepherd comforts the sheep when they are hurt and fearful.** God helps us to feel less anxious, less worried, and less frightened about the difficult situations in which we may find ourselves.

Even in the unending shadows of death's darkness, I am not overcome by fear.

Because You are with me in those dark moments, near with Your protection and guidance, I am comforted.

1. **A Good Shepherd loves his sheep and develops a close, intimate relationship with them so that they know His voice and trust Him.** In today's society, we have many voices trying to tell us what to do and how to live our lives. There's TV, social media, our friends and even our family, but there is only one Voice that we can depend on to lead us; a Voice that has our best interests at heart. And that Voice is the voice of our God.

You spread out a table before me, provisions in the midst of attack from my enemies;

You care for all my needs, anointing my head with soothing, fragrant oil, filling my cup again and again with Your grace.

That description not only reminds us of David's testimony of God as His Shepherd, we see that the Shepherd the Psalmist talks about has become flesh and blood for us, in the person of Jesus.

Jesus is the true Shepherd, and reflective of God's own providential love. Jesus' relationship with his disciples, His sheep, is one of intimacy and trust. He brings them no harm but protects them. They willingly follow Him, and He brings them to Himself, the source of life.

It is He who has stepped into our lives. It is He who is our Leader, whose role it is to guide and direct us through life. He is the Shepherd who is our provider, who meets our physical and spiritual needs and who provides for us security, safety and salvation.

Because of God's gracious gift of baptism, we have the salvation the Shepherd provides. Through our sharing of the bread and wine, we experience the presence of the Shepherd and receive His abundant grace, mercy and forgiveness through His feast of reconciliation.

***Certainly, Your faithful protection and loving provision will
pursue me
where I go, always, everywhere.
I will always be with the Eternal,
in Your house forever.***

Amen.