

*The Fourth Sunday of Easter  
Good Shepherd Sunday*

April 29, 2012

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke

Psalm 23

*The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*

“Mom, can you come in here?” Mom runs into her little girl’s bedroom and finds out she had a bad dream. “Dad, can I sleep in here with you tonight? I think there are monsters in my closet,” says his son. “You are going to go with me, right?,” asks the child on the first day of school, or the teenager with the job interview, or even the high school student going to check out a college. There is something about having someone we trust and love simply present in our time of need. What comforts and calms the troubled heart of a child is not an unrealistic promise that fears or problems will never return, but that mom or dad is there. In their very presence there is comfort. There is hope. There is peace. This is true all through life. It is also true in death. Often when a person senses death is near they will call out the names of their loved ones: “Vincent! Alexis! Jeff! Sarah!” They want their spouse and their children to be near. It is not even that their circumstances will change, but there is real comfort in just having their loved ones with them.

This has to be a big reason Psalm 23 is one of the most loved portions of Scripture. For this is the highlight, and the high point, of these beautiful words which have provided much strength, hope, comfort, peace and joy to countless Christians throughout the years. We have a Lord who is always with us. May our ever present God be our comfort and strength! There is real joy in just understanding He is near. So I pray we learn to trust and proclaim this great truth as we turn in faith to our Lord, our Savior, our friend, our King and our Shepherd and confess: **For You are with me!**

Because the Lord was always with David, David could say: “*The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.*” Because the Lord is always with us, each one of us can say: “*The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.*” We will lack nothing as long as our Shepherd is near. “*He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*” It is the Lord who provides us with all we need for body and life. That includes our food and drink, house and home, clothes, shoes and all that we own. But my Shepherd does so much more for me to take away my every want because my Shepherd is Jesus. Jesus is my good Shepherd who is also the dying lamb who carried for us the

anger of God at our sins, who died for wandering sheep like you and me, and rose again, who gathers us in his arms like little lambs and carries us. This shepherd knows my needs and well provides me. Yes, He well provides me with food and drink for my body, but the nourishment referred to here is the lush pasture of His Word and the cleansing refreshing water of His Gospel promises. He restores my soul. He also provides me with guidance as He guides me in right paths – to live according to His Word

So the Lord my God, my Good Shepherd Jesus, is always near to provide for both body and soul. He is also near when we need Him most. When more than childhood fears come our way, our Shepherd is with us to protect us. ***“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”*** Those familiar with shepherding in the hills of Judea, where David was a shepherd, tell us that the sheep would spend the winter months in the valley. And then, after the winter had passed, they would make the long, dangerous journey up the winding paths to reach the top of the hills where there was summer pasture. That is the picture David uses to describe our life. We walk through that dark valley filled with many dangers. I wonder if sheep ever think, *“The shepherd doesn’t know what he’s doing. He’s leading us up this steep, rocky path, or through this unsettling storm. There’s got to be an easier way.”* But eventually they reach that superb pasture, that clear flowing stream, and they know: the shepherd knew what he was doing all along. No, sheep don’t think that way. But we do. When trials come, when the road is hard and frightening, we wonder, *“Does our Good Shepherd know where’s He’s taking us? This can’t be the right way.”*

That’s why we need this constant reminder that the Lord is our good Shepherd. This is same Shepherd who willingly laid down His life on a cross for our sins and then took that life up again for us. He leads us on a path that is always best for us. Since not even death could hold Him we are able to have complete confidence that He will be with us at every single turn on our way. As Jesus promised His disciples: ***“Surely, I will be with you always to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28).*** So even in those dark valleys of life, even when the day comes that we may start to sense that death is near, we are able to say with David: ***“I will fear no evil, for you are with me.***

While our good Shepherd leads us what a feast He spreads before us in His precious Word! Like a host who welcomed his guest in ancient times by anointing his head with precious ointment, so our Lord invites us into His house and gives us a place at His table. He gives us an abundance of His good gifts. ***“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.”*** When we reach our destination we will realize that our Good Shepherd knew exactly where He was leading us, every step of the way. ***“Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”***

Through it all this is where the Good Shepherd seeks to lead every one of His sheep. He wants to lead us to heaven where we will see our Good Shepherd with our own eyes. He wants to bring us to heaven where the pastures are greenest and the flowing rivers most clear. He wants to bring us to heaven to the greatest feast of all. He wants to bring us to heaven where there will be no more dangers or enemies. He wants to bring us to heaven where we will live in the house of the Lord forever.

So as the Good Shepherd leads, wherever He leads, I pray we follow. I pray we follow knowing we are never alone. It is good to have people we love and trust to simply

be with us, to be present, to be near. But it is far better to be able to turn to Jesus and say every day, in every circumstance, in every trouble and trial, in every joy and sorrow, in life and in death: **For You Are with me!** What could be better than this? The psalmist had it right when he wrote: *“Whom have I in heaven but you, and earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”* Amen.