

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Fourth Sunday of Easter - Year C

Mother's Day

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Act 9:36-43

Psalm 23

Revelation 7:9-17

John 10:22-30

05/12/2019

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. John,

22At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, 23and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. 24So 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." 25Jesus answered, "I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; 26but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. 27My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. 28I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. 29What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. 30The Father and I are one."

The Gospel of our Lord.

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ! Amen.

My Shepherd

Good morning! What is it about the Twenty-Third Psalm that has helped it to remain such a powerful piece of scripture? And I think that it's the power of this text that has helped to make it the number one scripture that's read at funerals. One scholar writes saying: "*Why is Psalm 23 so popular, yet inevitably associated with death?*"¹ Most people are more familiar with the old King James translation of the text, but Father Mitchell Dahood S.J. offered a new take in his commentary written in 1965. He translates as follows:

1. Yahweh is my shepherd,

I shall not lack.

2. In green meadows he will make me lie down;

Near tranquil waters will he guide me,

to refresh my being.

3. He will lead me into luxuriant pastures,

as befits his name.

4. Even though I should walk

in the midst of total darkness,

I shall fear no danger

since you are with me.

Your rod and your staff—

behold, they will lead me.

¹ Bartlett, David L., and Barbara B. Taylor. *Feasting on the Word Year C, Volume 2*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008. p. 433.

5. You prepare my table before me,

in front of my adversaries.

You generously anoint my head with oil,

my cup overflows.

6. Surely goodness and kindness will attend me,

all the days of my life;

And I shall dwell in the house of Yahweh

for days without end.²

Beautiful isn't it? *"Even though I should walk in the midst of total darkness..."*

Total darkness, not the valley of shadow that we might expect. It brings a whole new perspective to this text only spoken during times of sadness and death.

It's been a rough few weeks for people all over the world. The last time I preached was Easter morning, and while we gathered to celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord, the people of Sri Lanka were suffering. In a coordinated attack, bombs were detonated at three churches and four hotels, killing 257 people and injuring 500.³ On Easter morning I was completely unaware of the violence, and then before my vacation was even over, news of another act of violence showed up on my phone. A shooter walked into a San Diego synagogue, yelling anti-Semitic slurs, and opened fire, killing one woman and injuring others. It's officially been labeled a hate crime, and the Rabbi of the

² Dahood, Mitchell J. *Psalms I : 1-50*. New Haven, Conn. London: Yale University Press, 2006. p. 145.

³ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/04/sri-lanka-bombings-latest-updates-190421092621543.html>

community put it wonderfully when he said that *“Terror will not win.”*⁴ Then last week we learned about an attack at UNC Charlotte, on the last day of classes, where a shooter killed two and injured four others during their attack. Most recently, two suspects walked into STEM School in Highland Ranch, Colorado and killed one person and injured another. The one person to die was Kendrick Castillo, and he would have been graduating this week. Accounts from the scene say that Castillo, along with other students, helped to stop the shooter.⁵ Castillo is a hero, and it’s his name that I want you to remember. I won’t give the shooters of any of these acts the pleasure of spreading their names. May they disappear into obscurity.

If you’re tired of hearing this type of bad news, I’m right there with you. Here’s the dirty little secret, we’re at a point now where a school shooting or act of terrorism doesn’t demand all our attention. A few months ago I was talking with a few friends of mine who are pastors and one made the comment that school shootings have become so “common” that they don’t necessarily mean the pastor re-does their entire sermon. It’s a sad day when these acts of violence have become “normal” to some people.

But as the Rev. Drew Tucker told me a few days ago, this isn’t normal. And when pastors don’t address the problem, or fail to call out the wrongness of the situation, we only end up contributing to the insanity. Let me make it abundantly clear. The world is NOT supposed to be this way. And more importantly, it doesn’t HAVE to be this way. We can choose something different, something counter-cultural in its ability to deny

⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/27/us/poway-synagogue-shooting.html>

⁵ https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2019/05/08/heroic-details-emerge-colorado-school-shooting/?utm_term=.1e4a5aa41f8e

that the status quo needs to be the way it is. We're still in the liturgical season of Easter, and thank God; Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia, Amen.

You know what I love about that call and response? It's the fact that we say it in the present tense. It's not Christ has risen, or Christ will rise, no, our savior is right now, at this very moment, rising from the dead and giving us new life. The present tense is also prevalent in the Twenty-Third Psalm, too. The Lord IS my shepherd, he LEADS me, he RESTORES me. Our God is actively working to change the world. Maybe that's why we love this psalm so much. In our grief, in our sorrow, or in our times of need, we can turn to this piece of scripture and put ourselves right in the midst of it. We become the first-person singular of the text, and the words wash over us.

One commentator wrote the following about Psalm 23: *"The God who is named and then addressed in Psalm 23 is trustworthy— with our lives, with our choices, with our fears and losses. Living out a fundamental attitude of trust is counterintuitive, even countercultural, in modern Western cultures."*⁶ But it's exactly that countercultural trust that we need right now. The chaos we see around us? It doesn't have to be this way, God is offering us something different, something SO MUCH better! Now I know, sometimes something new can seem strange or weird or just plain wrong, but isn't it possible that we've been overloaded all our lives with a way of life that is wrong, and it's gone on for so long that we don't even realize that there is a different way?

We can read the lines about God preparing a table before our enemies and we just assume that God will protect us, but what if it's something completely different? What if

⁶ Bartlett, David L., and Barbara B. Taylor. *Feasting on the Word Year C, Volume 2*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008. p. 433.

that table could become the very place where healing and reconciliation begins? Where we gather together to eat with our enemies not out of fear, but gathered together in hope. What would it look like to gather together, around a meal, a sacrament, and try something different? What might that look like?

1The Lord| is my shepherd;

I shall not | be in want.

2The Lord makes me lie down | in green pastures

and leads me be- | side still waters.

3You restore my | soul, O Lord,

and guide me along right pathways | for your name's sake.

4Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall | fear no evil;

for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they | comfort me.

5You prepare a table before me in the presence | of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil, and my cup is | running over.

6Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days | of my life,

and I will dwell in the house of the | Lord forever.

Amen.