

Daily Devotional Guide

Monday – Read Psalm 23:1. The psalmist begins by proclaiming, “The Lord is my shepherd.” Most of us recite that rather plainly - “The Lord is my shepherd.” We do it as a way to begin the psalm and get to the rest of it. However, for the psalmist this was a proud statement. It was, “THE LORD is MY Shepherd!” In other words, “You know who my shepherd is? The Lord.” Can you say it that way? This week we are going to take some time to reflect on the very first verse of this beloved psalm.

Tuesday – To claim that the Lord is your shepherd is to affirm some profound truths about God. One of the truths is that the Lord is your shepherd because he created you. I am told that shepherds know each of their sheep extremely well. Even if a shepherd has hundreds of sheep to care for he is familiar with each one. He knows what makes each of them unique. It is the same way with us. God created us and knows us better than we know ourselves. We can take comfort from the fact that when we go to our shepherd for help he is intimately aware of who we are.

Wednesday - Real shepherds will tell you that sheep don't just take care of themselves. They require great attention and care. It is no accident that the Lord calls us sheep. Sheep and humans have similar qualities (as we will see further in this series). We have a mob instinct like sheep; we are afraid like sheep; we are stubborn like sheep. We need help. We need a savior. We need a shepherd who will buy us and take care of us and that is what our Jesus has done. Remember that Jesus said in John 10:11, “I am the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep.”

Thursday – We know the Lord is our shepherd because he continues to guide us, intercede for us and care for us consistently. He never ceases to give us the best of care. He never ever stops loving us. No matter what we have done he never gives up on us. He is forever intersecting our lives in ways beyond our comprehension. When we wander off, he follows us. When we fall down, he picks us up. When we fail, he gives another chance and another. When we sin, he forgives. When we betray him, he is waiting for us when we turn back to him.

Friday - Have you allowed the Lord to be your shepherd? Is he your emergency switch in life, or is he your shepherd? Is he someone you admire, or is he your shepherd? Stop wandering around alone in the poisonous pastures of life. Stop trying to live this thing called life by yourself. Decide today to come under the shepherd's care this morning. Simply ask Jesus to come into your heart and cleanse you of your sin and be your shepherd. Life will never be the same.



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~ The Good Shepherd ~ *The Lord is My Shepherd*

Sunday, May 22, 2011

Sermon by: Dr. Charley Reeb, Senior Pastor

Scripture Lesson: Psalm 23: 1

When I was in college I went to visit the home of a man who was broken. He had been a prominent figure in the life of the college for many years. However, one day he committed a sinful indiscretion and his world collapsed around him. When I arrived at his door he looked like a shell of the man I knew. We sat down in his living room, and he told me that I was the first person from the college, student or faculty, who had come to see him since the infamous incident. He said he never felt so alone.

I asked him how he was holding up and he began to open up to me about everything. Then he got up, went over to his bookshelf and handed me a Bible and said, “Do you mind reading a passage to me out of there?” I said, “I don't mind at all. Which one?” He said, “Oh, the 23rd Psalm. That is my favorite. My Dad used to read it to me when I was kid.” So, I turned to the 23rd Psalm and began to read it. When I finished, I looked up and his eyes were closed and there were tears coming down his cheeks. He said, “Read it again, please...Read it again please.” I must have read it for him five or six times. I would visit with him several more times and every time he would hand me the same Bible and have me turn to the 23rd Psalm and read it.

I caught up with this man several years later and healing had taken place in his life. He was a new man. He told me that what kept him from losing it in the midst of that difficult time in his life were my visits when I would read him the 23rd Psalm. “I have walked through the valley of the shadow of death and my shepherd was there. You reminded me of that.”

The 23rd Psalm – one of the most popular and beloved passages in all of scripture. It is prayed and read at more bedtimes, funerals, retreats, worship services, and hospitals than perhaps any other passage of scripture. It strikes a chord deep within people. In

fact, as I read it just a moment ago, I am sure there were many of you who felt a deep spiritual attachment to the words—maybe you connected the words to a pivotal moment in your life.

I believe what makes 23rd Psalm so special to so many people is that it emphasizes our deep connection to the Lord and the way in which the Lord provides for us. But as special as this psalm is for many of us, most of us have not even scratched the surface of it. To do so is to come face to face with God. So my prayer for this series is, that as we look closer at the 23rd Psalm we will come to a greater appreciation of it, and, most of all, come to love our shepherd even more.

So, the psalmist begins quite clearly, “The Lord is my shepherd.” Most of us recite that rather plainly, “The Lord is my shepherd.” We do it as a way to begin the psalm and get to the rest of it. But for the psalmist this was a proud statement. It was not, “The Lord is my shepherd.” It was “THE LORD is MY Shepherd!” In other words, “You know who my shepherd is? THE LORD.” Can you say it that way? The truth is we need a shepherd.

We would not readily admit this, but we are a lot like sheep. There is a reason we are compared to sheep in this psalm. No other animal is as dependent upon a caregiver as sheep. John Harnish reminds us: “If they roll over on their backs, they stay there, and they can die. If a dog or wolf comes into the pack, they are utterly defenseless. If they get lost, they are hopeless and helpless. They can eat their way into the briars and hedgerows, simply following their noses until their nubby, woolly coats become tangled in the brush and they are stuck there until someone gets them out. Sheep are totally dependent upon the shepherd for life itself.” This sounds very familiar. Sounds a lot like human beings.

We do need a shepherd, but we try very hard not to admit this. On days other than Sundays many of us live our lives as if God ought to be privileged to know us. We can take care of ourselves. We know how to be successful. We plan. We work. We know how to get things done. We are self-reliant and proud of it. We don't need a shepherd.

James Rudin, a writer for the UM Reporter, describes how a contemporary news editor might have tried to update David's psalm to more adequately address the reality of American life today:

“‘The Lord's my shepherd.’ Drop the shepherd analogy. It alienates the modern reader. Also, change ‘Lord’ to something else. It's not gender neutral. We prefer: ‘The Celestial Spirit provides the self-help I need to successfully make my way in a stressful society.’”

This makes sense until we get that phone call in the middle of the night that shakes us to our core. Being self-reliant makes sense until the doctor gives us the news. All of this sounds good until we wander off into places we thought we would never go and feel hopeless and helpless. Then we realize we need a shepherd.

One of the reasons we need a shepherd is we need a divine connection. I remember going to the Grand Canyon a few years ago and being overwhelmed by such a sight. I was humbled. As I looked over that great chasm I felt so small. God seemed so big – bigger than I could ever imagine. I get the same feeling when I take off in a plane. As we ascend, the people, houses and streets get smaller and smaller. The world begins to look so vast, and the little place I live in looks so tiny. God seems so big – bigger than I ever could imagine. And I go out and look at the stars and on a clear night and see how many there are and I realize how gigantic our universe is and how earth is just one small speck of matter in space. God seems so big – bigger than I could ever imagine.

As awesome as God and his creation is, it is amazingly small and complex. We could go outside, pick up a handful of dirt, and put it under a microscope and find billions of micro-organisms with their own unique cellular structure—moving and operating in ways beyond us.

God's creation is so big and so complex, who am I, who are we that He is mindful of us? Yet, the incredible fact is that God who created it all, who is the intelligence behind it all, created us, not as an experiment, not as an accessory, but God created us to be the object of His affection!

This is why David cries out, “The LORD is MY Shepherd.” David is expressing an intimate connection

to God – a connection all of us were created for. This is why so many people walk around disappointed by life. They seek an intimate connection that can only be found in God, but they look everywhere, except to God, to find it.

We need a shepherd because we need a divine connection. We also need a shepherd because we need a savior. Jesus said in John 10:11, “I am the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep.”

We have already established that sheep don't just take care of themselves. They require great attention and care. Sheep and humans have similar qualities. We have a mob instinct like sheep; we are afraid like sheep; we are stubborn like sheep. We need help. We need a savior.

In his book, *Written in Blood*, Robert Coleman tells the story of a little boy whose sister needed a blood transfusion. She had the same disease the boy had recovered from two years earlier. The only way she could recover would be through a blood transfusion from someone who had previously conquered the disease. Since the two children had the same rare blood type, the boy was the ideal donor.

This is how Coleman recounted the story: “‘Would you give your blood to Mary?’ the doctor asked. Johnny hesitated. His lower lip started to tremble. Then he smiled and said, ‘Sure, for my sister.’ Soon the two children were wheeled into the hospital room—Mary, pale and thin; Johnny, robust and healthy. Neither spoke, but when their eyes met, Johnny grinned. As the nurse inserted the needle into his arm, Johnny's smile faded. He watched the blood flow through the tube. With the ordeal almost over, his voice, slightly shaky, broke the silence. ‘Doctor, when do I die?’ Only then did the doctor realize why Johnny had hesitated, why his lip had trembled when he'd agreed to donate his blood. He thought giving his blood to his sister meant giving up his life. In that brief moment, he'd made his great decision. Johnny, fortunately, didn't have to die to save his sister.”

We have a condition that is worse than Mary's. It is a condition that can destroy our lives. It is sin. Jesus not only gave his blood, but gave his life to save us from it. We need a savior and we have one in Jesus Christ.

We need a shepherd because we need a driving connection and we need a savior. But we also need a shepherd because, quite simply, we need love. I have been a pastor for some time now, and after listening to people from all walks of life share from the depths of their heart, I have come to the simple conclusion that at the end of the day what people really need is love. People don't need criticism or five cent advice. People

desperately need love. People need the love of the shepherd.

The world can be a cruel and selfish place, but there is one who is always there to love us back to life. There is one whose love will never leave us. I am talking about the love of the shepherd. His love is always there for us to embrace; we just have to open ourselves to it.

The love of the shepherd is relentless. When we wander off, he follows us. When we fall down, he picks us up. When we fail, he gives another chance. When we sin, he forgives. When we betray him, he is waiting for us when we turn back to him. Have you ever thought about all the ways the love of the shepherd has blessed you in your life?

I recently read about a colleague of mine who had the opportunity of leading music for a worship service in a leper colony on the Island of Tobago. It was almost time for the sermon to be preached, so they had room for one more song. He asked for a request. A woman, who had been facing away from the pulpit, turned toward him and raised a hand that had no fingers. Her nose was entirely gone. Both ears were basically missing. Most of her lips had rotted away. The rest of her body was filled with terrible cankerous sores from leprosy.

The worship leader was hardly able to look at her. He asked, “And what would you like for us to sing?” She replied, “How about, ‘Count Your Many Blessings.’” My colleague was so overwhelmed with grief that he walked off the platform and out of the room. One of his church members followed him out the door and said, “Brother Jack, I guess you'll never be able to sing that song again.” The pastor said, “Yes, I will, but I'll never sing it the same way again” (story recounted by James Merritt). Have you counted the blessings of the shepherd?

I believe we ask God for too little. We usually ask God for a yes or no answer, or a quick sign of some kind. We typically ask God for a map or a point in the right direction. But we are cheating ourselves. What we can have is the guide Himself! Stop wandering around in life. Come under the shepherd's care today.

One of the greatest preachers whoever lived was a man named John Chrysostom. He preached during the 4th Century. They nicknamed him “The Golden Mouth.” The story is told of the time when Chrysostom was brought before one of the pagan rulers and told that he was required to give up his faith in Christ. Chrysostom refused. When he did, he was brought before the Roman Emperor.

The Roman Emperor threatened him by saying, “I will banish you!” Chrysostom said, “You cannot

banish me, for this world is my Father's world.” The Emperor said, “Then I will slay you.” Chrysostom said, “You cannot slay me, for my life is hid with Christ in God.” The Emperor said, “Then I will take away your treasures.” Chrysostom said, “You cannot take away my treasure because my treasure is in heaven, and so is my heart.”

The Emperor said, “Then I will drive you away from every human being and you won't have one friend left.” Chrysostom said, “You can't do that either, for I have a friend in heaven who sticks closer than a brother from whom nothing can ever separate us.” Chrysostom then stood up, looked the Emperor in the eye and said, “You need to understand, in my heart there is no fear, for there is nothing you can do to hurt me.”

When you come under the shepherd's care you realize that His love is stronger than anything in this world. Come and experience that love. Come under the shepherd's care. Amen