

Easter 4 (Good Shepherd Sunday) May 8, 2022

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish

Psalm 23, John 10:22-30

“My Shepherd” Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ who is one with his Father. Amen.

“My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.”

Our confirmation students will make public professions of their faith today. They will confess that they know the difference between the many voices that are calling out to them. For the past two years these students have been listening to the kinds of commands and promises Jesus and his Father say through many bible lessons and teachings of the catechism. They have learned to know the voice of the Good Shepherd. For a review of some of the key points from these lessons, these confirmands were asked 75 questions about people in the bible, where our Lutheran heritage came from, seasons of the church calendar, and how the parts of the catechism function in their faith formation. Today, the focus is on what these students believe and they will use the Apostle’s Creed today to declare what the Holy Trinity means to them today and what it will mean to them for them throughout their lives.

The Apostle’s Creed hadn’t been written when David was a shepherd or a king. However, if David would have been required to write a faith statement for his confirmation, the 23rd Psalm is more than a familiar psalm to us, it is a wonderful Creed or statement of faith. Today we will look at each verse, or article of faith, and notice how they align with scripture and the catechism that we use for teaching today.

1 The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want;

The first verse sounds much like the first commandment. David knew who to trust and who could not be trusted. After learning to listen only to the voice of God, David declared that he was not just a shepherd, but he professed the Lord is MY shepherd. The second part of this verse affirms that we are to trust our Lord above anything or anyone else. In this first verse we hear how our Lord is to be trusted to provide daily bread for us even though we don’t deserve these good gifts of food, family, clothing and everything we need from day to day. This first verse spells out the function of God the Father who creates and provides for us as described in the first article of the Apostle’s Creed.

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters;

In David’s Psalm, he makes clear who is the active party in faith...and it isn’t you. In this verse, we hear the work of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the trinity who calls and gathers you into faith. Faith is not a personal choice; it is a divine election by the Holy Spirit. The green pastures that you are led to are what you are doing today as you Remember the Sabbath Day and Keep it Holy. It is when you rest and listen to God

Speak his words of forgiveness to you that you find peace. We also give our Lord thanks for the days he grants us to enjoy the life that he gives to us each day. We find it easy to complain about the waves in our lives that may cause us to doubt that we have a God who cares for us. But our God knows what we can bear and leads us to still waters to listen to him speak to us and to restore our faith.

3 He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness

for his name's sake.

David knew and confessed that there was nothing about himself to be proud of. David sinned and when his sin was unconfessed, David sinned more. David was unable to restore his own soul. As we also confessed this morning, we are in bondage to sin, and we cannot free ourselves. However, God's word that first accuses us also leads us to the path of righteousness. Jesus said, I am the way, the truth, and the life. Jesus is the path, and we are made righteous when he declares our sins are forgiven and we receive his unconditional goodness and mercy.

4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

While the good news of Easter is still ringing in our ears, we know that Jesus has defeated death. Death is not a place for us to fear since death is no more since sin is no more after Jesus finished his work on the cross and rising from the dead. There is no question that each one of us may feel times in our lives that we are walking in the shadow of death. Recently, several people in our congregation know how close they have felt to death. But in every case, because of their faith, they also knew that God was walking with them as they were led through, not into, the valley of death. The Lord uses his rod to protect us from evil and his staff he uses to draw us closer to him so that we will be comforted by his certain and unfailing claim that he has made to us in the waters of baptism.

5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies; thou anointest my head with oil, my cup overflows.

David experienced many times when he was in the presence of his enemies. David also felt that the Lord was with him, providing for him while he was sitting with his enemies. Our prayer is often that the Lord would remove our enemies so that we could live each day by still waters. David teaches us that the Lord's will is done on earth as it is in heaven. And sometimes it is God's will for you to suffer on this earth. But even more importantly, it is God's will to never leave you alone. David was chosen by the Lord when he was anointed with oil on his head. You were chosen by the Lord when you were baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The blessings of the Lord are abundant. David may have wondered several times if he had emptied God's well of goodness toward him, but just like David, once declared a chosen child of God there is nothing

you can do to outspend God's cup of mercy that was shed for you.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

*The final question that I ask the confirmands in the final review is, "What is the most important thing you have learned in confirmation?" I was pleased to hear all their responses, but I really appreciated it when one student simply said, "Knowing that my sins are forgiven." This is the definition of the gospel. This gives the confidence that goodness and mercy will constantly be not just "following" you but will be pursuing you and hunting you down in this life to deliver this good news to you that eternal life is yours. It is my hope that whenever you hear this psalm you will recall this day that you confessed your faith, just as David did as put his faith in the good shepherd when he said, **The Lord is MY shepherd.** Amen.*