

Aldersgate UMC of Butte, MT
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May 15, 2022

Introduction to Scripture

Pastor Matthias Krier

It is rather humbling to deliver a message on the most beloved psalm in the book of Psalms. This Psalm has brought comfort and inspiration to millions and millions throughout the ages and continues to this day. It is a psalm of deep trust that continues to draw us closer to God.

My introduction to Psalm 23 comes from a beloved Rabbi by the name of Harold Kushner who wrote a book that helped me stay a minister in the Christian Faith. Had it not been for his book, *“When Bad Things Happen to Good People”*, I am not sure I could have stayed in the church. [Hear this 3 ½ minute introduction of Psalm 23 from Rabbi Kushner:](#)

[Harold Kushner | November 26, 2004 | Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly | PBS](#)

Scripture Lesson: Psalm 23 from the Message Bible

God, my shepherd! I don't need a thing. You have bedded me down in lush meadows, you find me quiet pools to drink from. True to your word, you let me catch my breath and send me in the right direction. Even when the way goes through Death Valley, I'm not afraid when you walk at my side. Your trusty shepherd's crook makes me feel secure. You serve me a six-course dinner right in front of my enemies. You revive my drooping head; my cup brims with blessing. Your beauty and love chase after me every day of my life. I'm back home in the house of God for the rest of my life.

The Word of God for the people of God. **Thanks be to God.**

Message

The Lord is My Shepherd

Pastor Matthias Krier



The Lord is my what? The Lord is My Shepherd!

At one time, the shepherd was a very powerful image for God so much so that in the gospel of John, Jesus refers to himself as the Good Shepherd caring for his sheep.

In antiquity, kings were often considered like a shepherd of the people. Kings were supposed to protect and provide for the people. However, not all kings were good, and needless to say, they were not always looking out for the common good, so the term “*Good Shepherd*” was and is considered by some to be an oxymoron of the times, a contradiction in terms if you will.

Jesus described himself as the Good Shepherd in the gospel of John:

11 'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. 14I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, 15just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. John 10:11-15

Jesus laid down his life for his sheep, did he not?



The contrast is stark of what Jesus uses here to illustrate. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep in the way that a good shepherd does.

Peterson in the Message Bible says, *“God my Shepherd, I don’t need a thing.”* In the King James Version it says, *“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want,”* Personally, I prefer to pray, *“I shall not want”* in this materialistic culture we live in where we are enticed to want everything. Advertising entices us to want, want, want everything we don’t really need. There is a difference between *want* and *need*, is there not?

However, since we live in such a materialistic culture where we are enticed to *want* this and to *want* that, let’s stay with the King James version of, *“I shall not want.”* (*pause*) Imagine if you will, if we only prayed the first line of this sacred psalm? Would this not mean that we are content with what we have and not always found to be wanting more?

Moving on in this psalm, the beauty in either translation refers to how nature can soothe us, calm us and make us whole. From the King James:

*He maketh me to lie down in green pastures,
He leadeth me beside the still waters
He restoreth my soul.*

Peterson in the Message Bible says it this way:

You have bedded me down in lush meadows, you find me quiet pools to drink from. True to your word, you let me catch my breath and send me in the right direction.

May we drink of these spring waters and truly be refreshed.

Peterson in this next portion paraphrases the psalm this way, *“Even when the way goes through Death Valley, I’m not afraid when you walk at my side. Your trusty shepherd’s crook makes me feel secure.”*

Our beloved King James Version say it this way:

“Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”

Rabbi Zalman, another rabbi I was learning from this week, informs us that the King James Version made an error in translation and that it is not, *“the valley of the shadow of death.”* Shadow of death here should have been translated as *“valley of dark shadows.”* And who hasn’t walked through valleys of dark shadows in their lives? Depression and suicide is rampant in our communities and in our nation.

As many of you know, May is Mental Health Matters Month.

When someone is having a bad day and taking it out on you or on someone else, I wonder what dark shadows are lurking in their lives. Instead of snapping back at someone, may we come back with understanding and compassion. Or maybe we are the one in need to ask for help. Asking for help is not a weakness. It takes strength and courage to ask for help.

I cannot imagine what may have happened to me in my late 20’s had I not gone to counseling. I was depressed, suicidal and in need of some serious therapy. At the time, I decided that not only would I go to a counselor, but that I would also see a Spiritual Director that would help me in experiencing the peace that surpasses all understanding.

This counseling and time of spiritual direction helped to heal my soul with myself and with God. Yes, I was angry with God in my 20’s because I thought God was

the cause of my pain. I learned as we heard from Rabbi Kushner that God is not the cause, but would be with me through the pain. I knew I could not become a pastor if I could not let go of my fear and my hurt and my pain. How could I be with other people's pain if I had not dealt with my own. During this time of healing I also discovered that I could replace this fear with LOVE from I John 4:18:
"There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear."

When confronted with my fears, I ask to be filled with love. Try it when facing some fear or problematic person. Simply pray, *"O God, fill me with love!"* Do it, breathe in love and exhale fear!

The next part of this psalm according to Peterson reads:

"You serve me a six-course dinner right in front of my enemies. You revive my drooping head; my cup brims with blessing."

King James Version reads:

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies, thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over.

Rabbi Zalmon says that the cup is not running over. It means that the *"cup is satisfying, I no longer thirst."*

In one of my readings about the 23rd psalm about a soldier who died in peace while listening to the 23rd Psalm. I know that some of you have done the same. There is something so very powerful in praying the 23rd Psalm to folks in hospice and on their deathbed and have had the same effect of reading this psalm to folks in their last hour. Shouldn't the term *"deathbed"* be called a *"lifebed"*, because once we take our last breath, it is new life, is it not? We are born anew!

Maybe you have experienced this as well. We shall recite together the 23rd Psalm in the King James Version as our closing prayer. Feel free to read along using the front of your bulletin or reading on screen. If you know it by heart, you can simply close your eyes and pray these words together:

Psalm 23

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

²He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

³He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

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

⁵Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever. Amen.

A couple of weeks ago I spoke about the many who are afraid to die and it is difficult to live everyday as if it were your last—if you are afraid to die. This psalm has a way once one has hidden it away in your heart, to help reduce the fear of dying.

Fred Crase introduced me to a song that I have asked him to sing today in preparation for Holy Communion. The title of the song is, "*Fear is Not My Guide.*" The lyrics are in your bulletin if you wish to take these home and meditate on them. "Fear is Not My Guide," my Shepherd is.

Special Music

Fear is Not My Guide

Fred Crase

(If you want to hear this message and special music go to:

www.aldersgatebutte.org and click "*Sunday Worship Service*" ... then scroll pass bulletin and click on title: "*The Lord is My What*". For help, call the church office.)