

May 3, 2020 , Easter 4 (Good Shepherd Sunday)

Parts of this service marked with an asterisk () may be led by one person.*

Invocation

* The Good Shepherd cares for the sheep.

The Good Shepherd gives his life for the sheep.

The Good Shepherd does not let death have the last word.

Christ is risen!

Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Hymn *(Read or sung together)*

(Hymn lyrics printed under OneLicence # 11411292)

The Lord's my shepherd; I'll not want. He makes me down to lie
in pastures green; he leadeth me the quiet waters by.

He leadeth me, he leadeth me the quiet waters by.

My soul he doth restore again, and me to walk doth make
within the paths of righteousness, e'en for his own name's sake;
within the paths of righteousness, e'en for his own name's sake.

Yea, though I walk in death's dark vale, yet will I fear no ill;
for thou art with me, and thy rod and staff me comfort still;
for thou art with me, and thy rod and staff me comfort still.

My table thou hast richly spread in presence of my foes;
my head thou dost with oil anoint, and my cup overflows;
my head thou dost with oil anoint, and my cup overflows.

Goodness and mercy all my life shall surely follow me,
and in God's house forevermore my dwelling place shall be;
and in God's house forevermore my dwelling place shall be.

For those of you reading this on line, slightly modified version of this hymn may be heard by clicking here - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vIEDdqmmEZs>

Prayer of the Day *(Prayer used by permission of Augsburg Fortress (modified slightly))*

* Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Let us pray.

O God our shepherd, you know your sheep by name and lead us to safety through the valley of death. Guide us by your voice, that we may walk with faith and security to the joyous feast prepared in your house, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Scripture Reading

* The 23rd Psalm

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

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

he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I 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 mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.

The Word of the Lord.

Reflection

* Billy was 6 when his grandfather died.

His family had begun to attend church services when he was 5, and he was baptized during the Easter season when he was 6.

Billy was a neat kid. He was very intelligent, very observant, and had lots of energy. He also had ADHD, so sitting still was not something he did very well. He squirmed in church, he squirmed in Sunday School, he squirmed pretty much everywhere.

But in spite of that, he was especially good at absorbing the stories which we told in church. He would squirm away during the service, but later that day, at home, he could repeat, almost word for word, the story from the gospel reading for that day.

So when his grandfather died, very suddenly, Billy tried to make sense of what had just happened. And, because church and his baptism had been a priority for the last year of his life, he tried to use the stories he had heard in church to help in this process.

So one morning, Billy came out to his mother and asked, "Mom, why hasn't Grandpa come back from the dead like Jesus did?"

We may smile at Billy's naiveté and innocence, because we have come to understand that God's care for us is rather deeper and more complex. We discover that our Shepherd cares for us in the *middle* of bad times, in the *middle* of the valleys, not to make them better, but to make *us* into people who are learning to trust.

But this is a gradual process. It takes a long time, and we frequently slip backwards on this journey.

I know that a lot of us felt like Billy last week, when the news came about the awful tragedy in Portapique and the surrounding area. All of a sudden, we, like Billy, were asking questions like, "If God cares for us, how could this happen?" "If God is a God of love, what this all about?" "If we are trying to follow faithfully, why isn't life any different?" And, "How could this happen here?"

We know in our heads that there are no answers to those questions. We know in our heads that those are, in fact, the wrong questions. But when we are confronted with something so inexplicable, so wrong, and (to put it succinctly) so evil, we don't respond with our heads. We respond with our hearts.

But I think that's why the 23rd Psalm is so meaningful for so many people. It doesn't speak to our heads; it speaks directly to our hearts.

It reminds us, precisely *when* we are in the valley of death, that we do not walk there alone. It reminds us, precisely *when* we are surrounded by enemies, that God provides care for

us. It reminds us, precisely **when** we are isolated and scared, precisely **when** we are confronted with callousness and hate, that the isolation and fear, the callousness and hate **do not define us**.

The words, "The Lord is my shepherd," invite us to take a deep breath, get back up, and begin the journey again, toward being people who are learning to trust that promise.

Even when things go so drastically wrong, we can say, even if we have to say it with fearful and trembling voices, Christ is risen.

Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Amen.

Prayers of the People

* Celebrating the victory of love over death, we offer our prayers to God.

[Short pause]

Good Shepherd, you promise to care for us. May this promise sink deep in our hearts, that we may continue to learn to trust. God of Easter,

Hear our prayer.

Good Shepherd, you promise to restore us. Open our eyes to the ways in which we are broken, that we may also see your healing. God of Easter,

Hear our prayer.

Good Shepherd, you promise to go with us into our difficult times, into our impossible places. Open us to your presence, that we may have hope. God of Easter,

Hear our prayer.

Good Shepherd, you form us into a gathering which centres on you. Mold us more clearly into a community which has room for the world. God of Easter,

Hear our prayer.

Good Shepherd, your care embraces the fallen, the distraught, the abandoned, the isolated, the angry and the lost. We entrust to you those of whom we are aware who require healing, hope and safety.

[Names of those who are of special concern may be offered.]

God of Easter,

Hear our prayer.

Good Shepherd, your care-filled promise extends far beyond our current situation. Remind us, however, that it also extends into the **heart** of our current situation. God of Easter,

Hear our prayer.

We pray this in the name of our risen and living Saviour, Jesus the Christ, who taught us to pray,

Our Father....

Lord's Prayer (*Prayer used by permission of Augsburg Fortress*)

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

OR

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

OR

To pray with the leaders of our local congregations, you may click here -
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5D7r99aSnzg>

Hymn (*Read or sung together*)

(*Hymn lyrics printed under OneLicence # 11411292*)

Saviour like a shepherd lead us; much we need your tender care.
In your pleasant pastures feed us, for our use your fold prepare.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, you have bought us; we are yours.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, you have bought us; we are yours.

We are yours; in love befriend us, be the guardian of our way;
keep your flock, from sin defend us, seek us when we go astray.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, hear us children when we pray.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, hear us children when we pray.

You have promised to receive us, poor and sinful though we be;
you have mercy to relieve us, grace to cleanse, and pow'r to free.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, early let us turn to you.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, early let us turn to you.

Early let us seek your favour, early let us do your will;
blessed Lord and only Saviour, with your love our spirits fill.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, you have loved us, love us still.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, you have loved us, love us still.

For those of you reading this on line, slightly modified version of this hymn may be heard by clicking here - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQd2sh-nQ_M

Benediction (*Read together*)

May almighty God,

The Father who created us to live in love,

The Son (†) who died and rose to bring us new life,

And the Spirit who make the promise of God new every day,

bless us all, now and forever. Amen.

Go in peace. Christ goes with you.

Thanks be to God!

For Christ is risen!

Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!