

Psalm 23 – A Meditation + Hymn
The Fourth Sunday of Easter – April 17, 2016
Roy W. Howard

The Psalms are prayers prayed by the people of God for centuries. The only way to preach them well is to pray them and sing them together. This morning we are going to do just that as I lead you in a set of meditations on Psalm 23. After each line, I will give you an invitation for meditation and prayer. Then Jeff will sing a line from the hymn – The King of Love My Shepherd is – to conclude each section. Make yourself comfortable, feet on the floor. Breathe. Feel free to close your eyes, open your hands and your heart in prayer. We begin with verse one.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

Meditation: In the scripture God is described as a Shepherd who provides for the needs of the people. Jesus is the Good Shepherd watching over the flock who hears his voice and follows him. Sit a moment with this metaphor of God as Shepherd. Let your mind rest in the knowledge that God is sufficient to supply your needs.

The King of Love – Stanza 1

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

Meditation: The Psalmist imagines himself as a sheep being led gently into the beauty of creation. You and I are invited to do the same: entering into the intimacy and trust implied by this relationship. Provision is made for the peace that comes from creation: grass for grazing, water for life. All that is needed for peace is provided. Consider your place in the beauty of creation with your Shepherd.

The King of Love – Stanza 2

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

Meditation: The Good Shepherd supplies our needs and makes provisions for peace and beauty within the realm of creation. Even so, there are occasions when your spirit seems diminished; your inner being worn down by the demands of living. Perhaps it is boredom, apathy or loss of energy for doing what is right in a messy world. It is possible to feel lost. Open your heart now to the possibility that God, your Good Shepherd, will restore you; will grant you inner strength and will lead you in doing what is right in God's sight.

The King of Love – Stanza 3

Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and staff—they comfort me.

Meditation: Here is our place of greatest challenge: facing sorrow and sadness and even death itself that appears arrayed against you like an enemy against the innocent. Yet, you and I are summoned to enter the dark valleys of the world – our own and that of others – without fear and with the confidence that we are never alone and never left comfortless. Receive now the promise of God’s comfort and release your fears into the deep trust that you are never alone.

The King of Love – Stanza 4

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Meditation: The psalmist employs the metaphor to proclaim the abundance of God and the very possibility of sitting at table in the presence of ones enemies. Holy Communion. Life is overflowing in a rich banquet of blessing. Sit now with this image of God’s overflowing life laid out so daringly before you.

The King of Love – Stanza 5

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

Meditation: You and I live life the only way possible: one day at a time. The promise is that each day and each day after that can be filled with goodness and mercy. There is comfort and peace in the heart’s knowing that our God accompanies us each day until all our days are done and our baptism is made complete. With open hands and open heart, rest your heart in God.

The King of Love – Stanza 6

**In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.
Amen**