

Fourth Sunday of Easter  
Sermon Text: Psalm 23  
Related Text: John 10:22-30  
Date preached: April 25, 2010

Alleluia, Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” It is important that we hear the words of this Psalm outside the context of a loved ones death. For as comforting as this text is at the time of a funeral, this text speaks volumes about our life on earth.

This psalm reflects our life of faith. The Lord, who for us is Christ Jesus, is my shepherd. As the shepherd guides, cares for, protects and feeds the sheep, this is what our Lord does for us.

Since the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. I must admit that we are a very wanting people and this is encouraged by those who have something to sell us. Yet, these wants run so much deeper than the silly enjoyments of life, such as wanting a particular Hockey team to win the Stanley Cup.

Rather this speaks about the basic levels of human need. I shall not want includes things which are important. It also speaks of the elements of life that are beyond purchase.

With the Lord we do not want for friendship. It is provided. With the Lord we do not want for love. With the Lord we do not want for meaning for our lives. The Lord knows we need these things and provides for them. The struggle we have as sinful creatures is that we frequently want these things on our own timetables. We get it in our minds that the Lord has to provide this to us in certain ways. Such times may act as a fog that keeps us from seeing what lies ahead and how it is He provides for us.

And yet the time comes when we simply need to be still and wait. Such stillness and waiting is one of prayer. Stillness and waiting invite reflection, rest, and the opportunity to see God' bless us with renewed strength.

This is what God did for Elijah when things got difficult and he felt threatened. Fearing that all the faithful voices were silenced in death, God led him to a place that restored Elijah's spirit.

When Elijah was renewed in his faith, God then led him along the right pathways. God too will lead us in right pathways for his name sake. This good news is comforting.

Too often we go astray from where God is leading us. We may see things coming up that we don't like and try to avoid them, when God is calling us to be witnesses in those moments.

For example, it is disheartening when we see the pictures of children that are dying from malnourishment. It is painful to see the affects poverty has on the homeless, or the working parents who are barely able to make ends meet. Yet in ministry it is often in struggling situations where God is leading us.

God leads us there not to break our hearts, but to stir us to act and speak out for justice. Such things lead us to support people through such ministries as the World Hunger Appeal of the ELCA, or to support mission trips that members of our congregation are taking on our behalf.

At times God leads us into the deepest valleys of life where the shadow of death is visible. It is a place of pain, and it is often a place where we go kicking and screaming. Yet, God does not abandon us to these places. God leads us to be in the shadows with the grieving, the hurting, the dying and others in deep longing for life.

In these moments come opportunities to proclaim the life we have in Christ. God leads us to meet people where they are and through compassionate care, be the visible presence of Christ to lead them through the shadows of death.

Where we emerge from death's shadow is a place of life. It is a life where reconciliation is possible, even in our life today.

The image of enemies feasting at table together is an image of hope. We see this image in our reading from Revelation. A great multitude encompasses every tribe, and persons of various languages. The anointing of God rests equally upon his children. In our life of faith we model that here in worship.

In worship we can come together to proclaim the good news of Christ. In worship we feast at the table of God's grace, the body and blood of Christ given and shed for you.

From this table, God's abiding presence is with us as we live each day of our lives. God is present with mercy and goodness that comes to us in surprising ways. To this end, we have the promise of God living among us in the now, until we join the heavenly chorus of saints in heaven. AMEN.