**4th Sunday of Easter- Modified Service, May 3, 2020**

**Zion Ev. Lutheran Chruch, Philipsburg**

Welcome everyone to our modified service today, it is good to gather in spirit each week to listen to the Word, to pray together and listen to some beautiful hymns. Thank you to Jane and Trevor who gift us with their wonderful talents. I cannot believe it is already May. There is a joke going around social media saying that February had 29 days, March had 465, April was 5 years….I do not know how long May will be. I do know that as each day passes, it is one day closer to when we will be able to worship together, and I give thanks to God for that day. Please remember that Zion relies on your weekly contributions to keep up with our expenses. Thanks to everyone who has contributed and kept the church and the congregation in your prayers.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

**Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

**And also with you.**

**PRAYER OF THE DAY**

Let us pray.

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

**Amen.**

**ACTS 2:42-47**

42[The baptized] devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43Awe came upon everyone because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. 44All who believed were together and had all things in common; 45they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, 47praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

**PSALM: Psalm 23**

1The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want.  
 2The Lord makes me lie down in green pastures and leads me beside still waters.  
 3You restore my soul, O Lord,

and guide me along right pathways for your name’s sake.  
 4Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall  fear no evil;  
  for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.   
 5You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;  
  you anoint my head with oil, and my cup is running over.  
 6Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,  
  and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever**.**

**Reflection**

Today we are celebrating the 4th Sunday of Easter which is also known as Good Shepherd Sunday. Our readings today (including the gospel of John 10:1-10) and the hymns included on the website are full of the pastoral image of sheep being cared for under the watchful eye of the shepherd. Included in our readings today is Psalm 23 which is probably the best-known psalm, no, probably the best-known passage in all of Scripture. It is most often read at funerals as a familiar source of comfort for grieving families. Hearing and understanding the imagery of God as a shepherd and protector leading us beside still waters and green pastures soothes the soul and brings peace and calm to our troubled hearts and minds.

This psalm has brought me great comfort over the years during times of grief and sorrow, but as I read it this week I gained a new appreciation and perspective, perhaps because of the times we are in. It started with the very first line, “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want.” It was the “be in want” that caught my interest this week. As we are all aware, we are about to enter our 7th week of social distancing and isolation due to the Covid-19 pandemic. During the past 6 weeks, we have been asked to stay home and only go out when necessary to buy the essentials needed for daily living like groceries and medication. All non-essential businesses have been closed; our hair is getting longer and more grey (maybe that’s just me), we cannot enjoy going out to our favourite restaurant for a meal with friends or family, we are limited to buying only 1 dozen eggs per shopping trip, we cannot go to the local parks or playground. The list of “can nots” is leaving many folks bored, frustrated, and even angry feeling like their freedoms are being challenged. Over the past few weeks’ protests have been organized in both Canada and the United States, and late this past week hundreds of citizens in Michigan, dressed in army fatigues armed with semi automatic rifles stormed the state-building demanding a quicker reopening of the economy stating their constitutional rights have been violated. “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want.”

We are a society driven by wants. We are constantly being bombarded by social media and advertising, 24/7, 365 days a year. We can order anything we want, at any time of the day and receive it the next day, and we get grumpy if it arrives a day later than what was expected. We covet what our neighbours have, we want to be the first in line for the newest gadget or toy, we spend beyond our means. David Lose suggests that we are a society “consumed by what we lack instead of being grateful for our abundance.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Let me read that again, we are consumed by what we lack, instead of being grateful for our abundance. We spend so much time trying to keep up with the Jones’, we are individualistic worrying more about ourselves than those around us, we forget to be thankful for all that God has provided us with.

When we read Psalm 23 we are reminded of what God has provided us with and it does comfort us when we experience death and sorrow, but Psalm 23 is also about living fully, abundantly, and contently with God in our present world. It is a psalm of trust knowing that there is a loving God who provides what we need both physically and spiritually. On this Good Shepherd Sunday, we can be encouraged through the Word to know that it is God who provides pastures in which to grow needed crops, it is God who provides still waters to quench our thirst. It is God who protects us and leads us home when we stray, it is God who gives us rest that restores our souls, and it is God through the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ who provides us with eternal life.

Reading Psalm 23 during these times of isolation and uncertainty gives us an opportunity to reflect on both the blessings and struggles that occur in our lives. Life is and can be difficult; there are hills of joy and celebration, but there are also valleys and shadows of death that leave us fearful. There are hungry people in the world who struggle to find enough to eat, there are thousands of people dying of an illness that we very little about, there are thousands of others who suffer illness and injury. It is a tension that we live within our faith and in our daily lives. But it gives us comfort and strength to know that God is our shepherd both in the struggles and joys of our lives. We can trust that God provides for us by showing us how to live with resilience and compassion, by revealing to us how to love our neighbours and be a community caring and providing for others from a safe distance, and by showing us that we have enough, that we are enough, and that mostly we are loved. I would like to share a poem written by Eugene Peterson. It is his interpretation of Psalm 23, God’s unending love for us. Peterson was a Presbyterian minister who transliterated a well-known version of the Bible into the Message[[2]](#footnote-2),

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 by 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.

So may our hair grow longer and greyer, may we continue to order takeout and call and our friends and family on the phone and online. May we grow into the abundance that God provides, trusting that God is our shepherd, a shepherd who nurtures, protects, and loves us each and every day. Amen.

**PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

Uplifted by the promised hope of healing and resurrection, we join the people of God in all times and places in praying for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

Shepherding God, we thank you for the educational ministries of your church. Enrich the work of teachers, professors, mentors, advisors, and faculty at colleges, seminaries. We pray for Martin Luther University College. Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

Creating God, we praise you for those who maintain and operate farm equipment, for those who plant and harvest crops, and for those involved in agriculture of any kind. Bring favourable weather so fields may be prepared and planted. Strengthen their hands as they feed the world. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Abundant God, no one should be in want. Bid the nations to return to your paths of righteousness and inspire our leaders to walk in your ways, so that all may have the opportunity to live abundantly and sustainably. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Comforting God, you carry us tenderly. We pray for those who walk through dark valleys overshadowed by anxiety and overwhelmed with suffering from illness, or injury. We pray especially for Eddie, Elaine, Betty, Ruth, Mary Ann, all who suffer from the effects of Covid-19, the people of Nova Scotia, the victims and their families of the Canadian Armed Forces helicopter crash in Greece, and those we name in the stillness of our hearts. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Nurturing God, you desire justice for the hungry and the homeless. Bless advocacy work, food pantries, and feeding ministries in our congregations. We give thanks for the life-giving work of our very own Project R.E.D, the KW Food Bank, Wilmot Resource Centre, House of Friendship, oneROOF, St. John’s Kitchen, Ray of Hope, House of Blessing, Tavistock Assistance Program, and all other community agencies that support and shepherd those in need. May none of our neighbours lack for basic needs. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Everlasting God, your beloved has heard your voice; you have called them by name and guided them to your side in death. We thank you for their lives of faithful witness. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

With bold confidence in your love, almighty God, we place all for whom we pray into your eternal care, through Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

**THANKSGIVING FOR THE WORD**

Let us pray.

O God of justice and love, we give thanks to you that you illumine our way through life with the words of your Son. Give us the light we need, awaken us to the needs of others, and at the end bring all the world to your feast; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory forever.

**Amen.**

**LORD’S PRAYER**

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

**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,**

**forever and ever. Amen.**

**BLESSING**

May the one who brought forth Jesus from the dead raise you to new life, fill you with hope and turn your mourning into dancing.

Almighty God, Father + Son, and Holy Spirit bless you now and forever.

**Amen**

**DISMISSAL**

Alleluia, Christ is risen.

Go in peace. Share the good news.

**Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

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1. David Lose, “Psalm 23” from *In the Meantime,* posted February 25, 2013, accessed May 1, 2020, <http://www.davidlose.net/2013/02/psalm-23-as-counter-cultural-wisdom/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Nancy deClaissé-Walford, “Psalm 23” in *Working Preacher*, accessed May 1, 2020, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=4441>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)