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Easter IV  
April 26, 2026  
Text: Psalm 23  
Title: Don't Be Sheepish

The young boy, David, was sitting alone in the field. It was his job to watch over his father's flock of sheep, and he was doing his best to stay alert.. It was just so *boring!* As he sat in the shade of a tree during the heat of the day, he listened to the sounds of the sheep spread out over the surrounding area. Everything sounded fine. Normal. Boring.

His thoughts wandered to the recent events of his life. That strange old man, Samuel, who had visited with his father. He had asked to see each of his brothers and then him, the youngest, and when he had stood before Samuel, the old man poured oil over his head and proclaimed him king! It was very strange, and he didn't...

*Wait!* What was that? The sheep sounded different. Some were crying out in that strange sound of fear that they had, and it was getting louder! He then heard another sound. A low growl! Leaping to his feet and grabbing his rod he rushed toward that familiar, heart-chilling sound. As the young shepherd ran, he heard it again, *GRRRR...!* Then he saw it, the lion was moving away from the flock. He could see the white wool in the predator's mouth, still crying out and struggling.

Without hesitation the young boy knew what he had to do. He gripped his rod tighter, ran up to the lion, and swung with all of his might. The blow hit the animal's side, but it kept its grip on the helpless sheep. The lion stopped, turned toward David and swiped at him with his deadly claw! David seized the opportunity, grabbed the hair of the lion's chin and rammed the end of his rod into the beast's throat as hard as he could!

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The blow was perfect. The helpless sheep was released, and the lion dropped to the ground dying from the wound to its throat. The shepherd had done his job. The sheep had been saved from certain death.

Our text today, Psalm 23, was written by this shepherd. In spite of a details I've added here, David tells this story to Saul just before he goes out to face Goliath in I Samuel 17. It is from this experience that David is able to write this most famous Psalm. It is this experience that allows him to see the Lord as his shepherd. He knows firsthand the protection that comes from Yahweh, and he writes of it here.

As our shepherd, the Lord leads and cares for us, His sheep. The words give us great comfort beginning in the very first verse. Because the Lord is our shepherd we know that we will lack nothing that we need. Luther's explanation of the First Article of the Apostles' Creed states it nicely, "He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life."

In addition to Him providing for our needs, we have the assurance that "He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters." As the shepherd leads his flock to places that will provide food and rest, so the Lord provides these things for His people. It is interesting to keep in mind that the second half of the verse, "...beside still waters," can also be translated as "...beside waters of rest." A place that is peaceful and provides comfort, yes, but to the Hebrew mind the idea of "rest" is synonymous with redemption and salvation. It is in these ways that the comparison between our Lord and a shepherd is certainly appropriate.

Since the Lord is our shepherd in this word picture, it is natural to assume that we are considered to be His sheep. Now, I want you to think about this idea for a minute. When you think about sheep what comes into your mind? I would guess a lot of people like to see a picture

that's pretty much like a child's stuffed lamb. A cute little lamb with nice, clean white wool. It would have nice friendly eyes, and it might even look like it would make a good pet. It's a nice picture to think of when you're seeing it as a representation of yourself. The problem is that it comes from an artist, it's make-believe and it's not the truth of what sheep – and we – really are.

If you've ever been around a live sheep, then you know what I'm talking about, and I'm not talking about a sheep from a petting zoo either. No, a sheep from a pasture is not an animal that you want to be around, and it certainly isn't a flattering description for us. Sheep are animals that can have a real foul stench. It's one that lingers on you if you've touched them, or if you've just been near them for a long period of time.

They are not really very smart animals either. If you take a wooden pole and hold it in front of the first in a line of sheep, he'll jump over it, and so will every other sheep after him. In fact, they'll keep jumping at that exact same spot even if you move the pole out of the way so that it's no longer an obstacle! Not very smart. Finally, sheep will wander away from the protection of the flock and the shepherd even though it can be deadly. Literally. Again, not a very flattering description, is it?

Our sinfulness is what makes this comparison with sheep so true. When we commit a sin – and that happens constantly because, as we confess at the start of the Divine Service, we sin in “...thought, word and deed. By what we have done, and by what we have left undone.” – we have a stench before the Lord. As we sit here today, we sin simply by not wanting to be here, by longing to be somewhere else and thinking that being in God's presence is boring, or we might sin by thinking false things about our neighbor. Sin is what separates us from God and others in the first place. It lingers on us, and affects those around us so that they sin in reaction to our sin.

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Next, if we honestly look at ourselves, we will see that we are like sheep in that we don't seem very smart at times. Paul describes this perfectly in Romans 7:14 – 24. Verse 19 reads, "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do." We know what the right choice is, without exception we know, but we inevitably wind up doing evil instead because of the sin that controls us. It doesn't show very much intelligence does it? Just like the flock of sheep that will jump when there is nothing in the way anymore, we sin even when we know it's wrong.

Finally, we often turn and wander away from our shepherd just like sheep do at times. We go our own way, and don't listen to the voice of our shepherd. We stop going to church. We neglect our prayer and devotion time. We don't receive the Lord's Supper even when we know about the benefits that come to us through it. We want to take care of ourselves, and be completely independent of the Lord our Shepherd.

Thankfully, the comparison doesn't end here. The last four verses of the Psalm tell us the other way in which our Lord cares and provides for us. Verses 5 & 6 tell us, "He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me." The focus has shifted to our soul. It is here that Jesus, the Good Shepherd takes over. When He lays down His life for the sheep on the cross, as He declares in verse 11 of today's Gospel reading, our soul is restored. When we were lost, as He describes in the parable of the lost sheep in Matthew 18, He left the others, and He searched for us until He brought us back into the safety of the flock. As verse 6 stated, He uses His rod and staff to protect and comfort us in the "valley of the shadow of death."

It is these things that David learned when he was a shepherd in the fields as a boy, and it is these things that Jesus does for us as our Good Shepherd. His resurrection from the dead that we are still celebrating guarantees that we will never be without Him, and the Psalm also assures us of this in verse 6 with the words, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life...” There is no doubt in these words. They are a promise from the Good Shepherd Himself in the last words of Matthew, “...I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Where Jesus is, goodness and mercy are also there for the believer.

Finally, the Good Shepherd’s sacrifice for His sheep gives us the victory over our enemies of sin, death and the devil. Jesus prepares a table for us in the Lord’s Supper in the presence of these enemies, and invites us to receive His body and blood in this sacrament. This sacrament strengthens our faith, and it’s the means that the Shepherd uses to give us His grace. The grace of the Lord that brings to us the forgiveness of the sins that we commit every day in “...thought, word and deed. By what we have done and by what we have left undone.” This forgiveness is combined with the promise that as His sheep in His flock we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. For He is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.