

MINISTER'S MINUTE

4th Sunday of Easter

Morning Prayer

The Hope of Spring

God, thank you for Spring and the hope of warmer, longer, brighter days.

Thank you for the coming of growth and life and birth.

Thank you that things are coming awake in the world.

This is what our calendar says, and we do see some signs that it is real.

But we also still struggle with the residual layover of winter.

Now we ask that you bring into reality all that belongs in this season. Your word says that we will have provision, and hope, and joy, and health and loving relationships here and now in this life.

We ask that what belongs in this season would become actual in our practical lives.

We hope in you and in your promises. We hope in your gift of Spring.

- Author Unknown



This Sunday we have a focus on two scriptures that have to do with Jesus and God as our shepherds. To begin, I would like to reflect on a bit of my own past, sitting in an American History class in Grade 11. I remember seeing a sign above the chalkboard. It had a picture of sheep and said something very simple: "Don't be sheep". Now, having grown up in the church, this message always felt hard to hear and understand. My teacher, whom I respected very much, was telling everyone as we left class: "Remember, don't be sheep". I think this teacher was telling me to be my own person and not to follow the crowd. Sometimes students in high school can be led down a path that doesn't always work out in the way they might expect. And along with that message, here are a few extra pieces of advice that I received while growing up (maybe you have heard some of them): Stand on your own two feet. Don't be a follower, be a leader. Don't be a bystander, be an ally.

When it came to learning in faith and heart, the advice from

Sunday Scripture

Acts 2:42–47

The believers share everything in common.

Psalm 23 (VU pp. 747–749)

God is my shepherd.

1 Peter 2:19–25

Christ's example in suffering.

John 10:1–10

Jesus the good shepherd and the gate.

Psalm 23 Video:

The Lord is my Shepherd “Kids recite Psalm 23”

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?>

youth group was different. I was taught that it was an honour to be a sheep, that Jesus alluded to the idea that we ARE the sheep, that He was the Good Shepherd, and that we were to trust and follow God. Now, as a teenager, I wondered how I could also follow that kind of thinking. “Don’t be a sheep in class, but be a sheep in church.” The wisdom here is that God does truly offer us guidance like a shepherd, but like any faith lesson we have to go deeper and ask questions.

Let’s try to consider ourselves as sheep. In John 10:1-10 Jesus said his sheep followed him because they knew his voice. Now trust me, I know from experience that it is not always possible to hear God’s voice. We do not often hear voices from bushes or the sky and, if we do, it is often considered to be a fluke or a dream. It is not easy to follow a single voice, let alone truly know it is from God.

Adding to that, there are so many voices constantly competing, and often, all at the same time. To name a few: voices of loved ones, voices of those who have given advice, those that have said something that you cannot remember, memories that may haunt or bring regret and wonder. When there are so many voices, how are we to recognize Jesus’ voice in the midst of all that?

To answer this, I turn to the Psalm of David. Psalm 23 points out that God is an excellent shepherd and guide. We can faithfully accept that. The writer in John 10 points out that we already know God’s voice. We cannot as easily accept that. Yet, we may instinctively know God, because God created us. Put both of those things together and it shows that because we are God’s creation, we must have a deep connection to the Holy.

Have you ever felt a little voice in the back of your mind or spirit that is saying something to you? Was there a time when you were put into a situation where you needed to confront something or someone? We may not always name our inner voice as Holy, but is it enough to ask the question, “Is that you God?” Maybe it is.

I’d like to talk about David, who wrote Psalm 23 and many other Psalms in our Bible. Once upon a time, David was a shepherd, so it was natural for him to think about God as being a good shepherd. Learning how shepherds took care of their sheep in ancient times may help us understand more about this Psalm.

To begin, shepherds cared for their sheep night and day. They led them to grassy areas to graze and they took them to clean and calm waters to drink. In the heat, shepherds moved their flocks to cooler pastures. For days on end, shepherds worked and slept outdoors. The sheep under their care had complete trust in their voices; even when walking through dangerous places. Shepherds anointed their sheep with oil on their heads to protect them from mosquitos and other insects. At night they guarded their flocks from predators that howled and hunted in the darkness. Each evening, shepherds would count the sheep and check their health. Sheep would be called and led by the shepherd's staff. This staff would be long and often had a crook or hook at the end.

Perhaps some of these ideas remind you of the words from the Psalm or scripture reading. For example, "He makes me lie down in green pastures." And in John 10, Jesus spoke of himself as the good shepherd who gave his life for his sheep. It is surprising that Lord would call himself a shepherd because in Israel, and other ancient societies, to be a shepherd was considered to be the lowest of all positions. It was not a glamorous job; it was humble work, much like Jesus was a humble teacher to his followers.

Now that we know little bit about the background of a shepherd's work, we may be able to think of how David considered God to be a shepherd as well. Many of us have heard Psalm 23 many times, yet it remains to be a very personal piece of writing. The writer uses words like, "I", "me" and "you" which is similar to a diary entry. Perhaps that is why we trust in the words. David's testimony and personal experience of God are so precious that the words are repeated to this day. Psalm 23 is so well known and loved that it is used in services today; especially at funerals. The phrases are comforting in tough times because they remind us of the faith David had in God. His faith helped him to believe that he would never want for anything and he would never be in the dark shadow of a valley for very long. In fact, he believed that God would guide him, even if he did end up in a 'valley of shadow', in darkness or despair. We also may go through valleys in life, but God will continue to guide us through, even if it is only moment by moment.

In times when you find yourself tired, frustrated, weak, in the dark, downright lonely, or uncertain of the future, try to focus on the words of the Good Shepherd. Pray a little and trust that there is a way through the valley and know that God will see you safely though. Believe that there is good, even when taking new paths. And though situations may be difficult and unfamiliar, hold onto the truth that there is something better waiting on the other side of the dark valley. Every day may not be good, but try to find something good in each day.

Recall the Easter story. Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, gave his life to those who wished him dead for bringing news of 'love your neighbour', 'forgive each other' and 'trust in God'. May we realize true love and sacrifice because that is what Jesus did for us. Sometimes sacrifices can change a heart from making decisions that do not focus on God into those that do. A heart, when open to change and compassion, is guided by God. A mind, when flowing with creativity and imagination, is guided by God. The Spirit, when longing for connection and peace, is also guided by God.

Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, knows his sheep and the sheep know him. But in this modern world, it can sometimes be difficult to know what that means. So, let us simply go into our own spiritual lives and prayers to notice when we are being guided. Notice who is speaking to you. Notice how you invite God

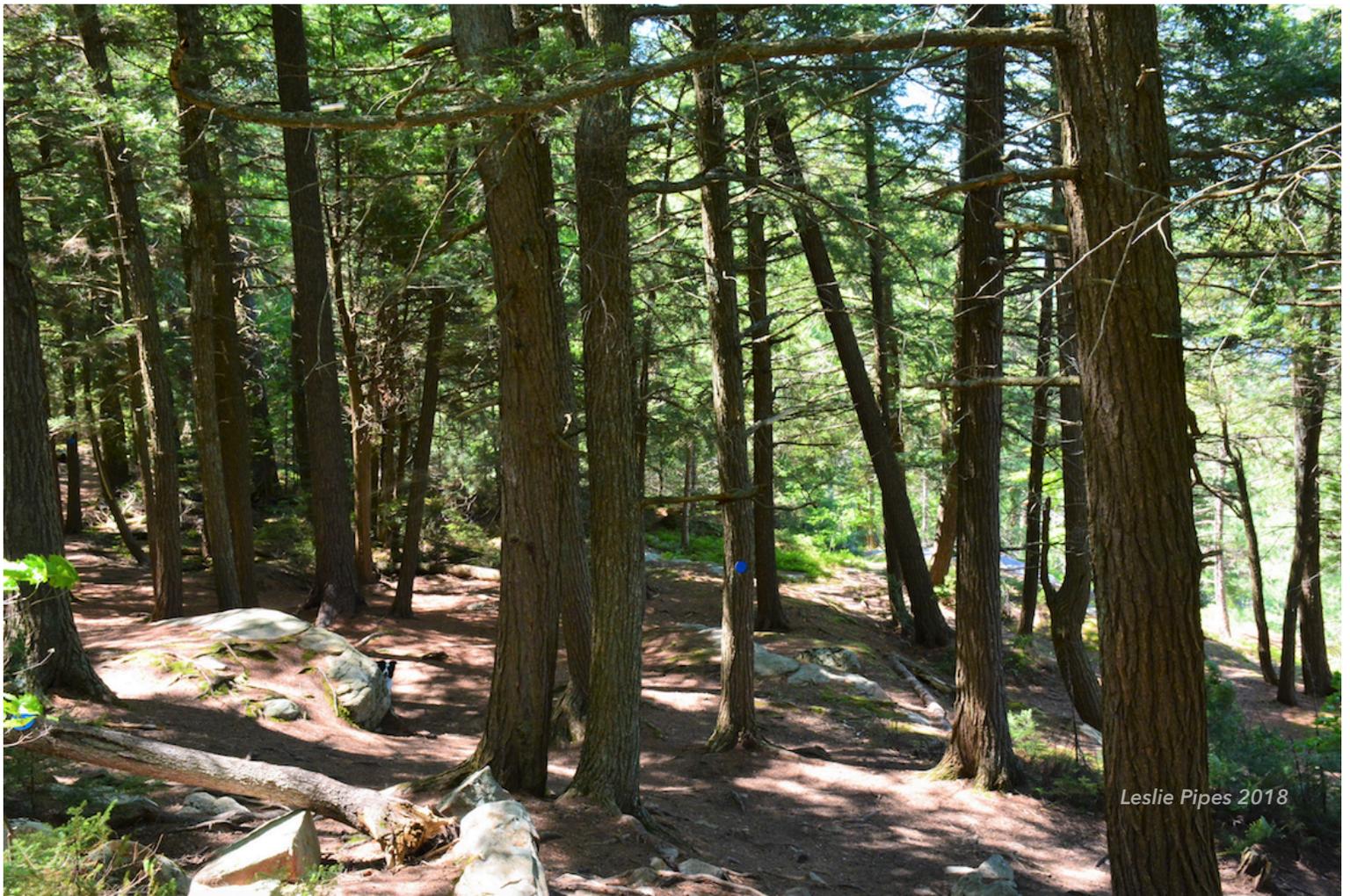
to guide you. And it is okay not to get it right all the time. Situations and problems between people sometimes arise and people need to refocus on God centred ideas and solutions. I believe we are most likely to solve problems, remembering patience and compassion, when we allow God to be our shepherd too.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

Rev. Emma

Sunday Fun: Can you find Gwen the Wonder Dog



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