**On Sheepishness**

Unity Church September 7, 2025

Psalm 23 Matthew 11:28-30

Mark Twain said that humans are the only animals on the face of the earth who blush, or need to. Apologies for my random-spastic mind, but when I think of being sheepish, I think of blushing. Today, I’d like to look at being like sheep, in a positive way, or in short- sheepish. Let’s do this by looking at the 23rd Psalm.

One of the reasons this psalm is so well loved is that in 6 little verses a Holy Spirit inspired David covers the nut of our relationship with our God, who loves us with an immeasurable caring, providing, leading, protecting, healing love that is beyond our understanding. It is scripture that comforts us, but should also blow our minds. Actually, this could be said about most of the Psalms.

Some years ago, as I began another trip through the Bible, I set out with the intention of looking for and recognizing the prophesy of the Old Testament. Not the obvious ones like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, but the people who we don’t look at as prophets: Moses, Abraham, Joshua and yes, David.

We look at the 23rd Psalm as a statement of Christ’s love and comfort, but when it was written, nearly a thousand years before our Lord’s birth, it was not only a hopeful, prayerful vision of the coming Messiah, but a prophetic announcement of what our Savior would be like. Jesus confirmed that prophesy in John 10, where he declares, “The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep,” and “I am the good shepherd.

A side note here: after Isaiah, Psalms is the second most quoted Old Testament book in the New Testament, by both Jesus Christ and the various apostles. If one takes the time to explore the unity of the scriptures, you will find a lot of Psalm citations which are confirmed prophesy. But this is a line to be explored while looking at the entire book.

1

In looking at the 23rd Psalm through the statement, “The Lord is my Shepherd,” we see various aspects of a shepherd’s responsibility. Among those are guiding, providing for, protecting, giving rest to, sheltering, healing and watching over his flock. Specifically:

Guiding: He leadeth me beside still waters, He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name sake.

Providing: I shall not want, He makes me to lie down in green pastures, Thou preparest a table before me, in the presence of mine enemies.

Protecting: Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

Giving rest: He restoreth my soul, my cup runneth over, goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.

Healing: Thou annointest my head with oil.

Keep in mind, the shepherd does almost everything for the sheep. They are, by and large, totally dependent on him. Without his care they would soon wander off, fall off the path or end up as lunch for any number of predators. Under the watchful care of the shepherd, they can do what sheep are supposed to do, graze, grow wool, produce mutton and hopefully, little sheep.

Whether we are taking about an earthly shepherd or Jesus Christ, the good shepherd, this Psalm is written from the sheep’s point of view, this is what my shepherd does for me, point of view. The question this psalm brings to us is how do we live and order our lives in the knowledge that the Lord is our shepherd?

if you think about it, what is required of the sheep is to stay close to, or follow the shepherd. The only way that the shepherd can guide, provide, and protect the sheep is if they were near him, or at least in proximity to him.

2

In John 10, Jesus says that the sheep know his voice. He calls them and they follow him. I doubted this story until I saw it demonstrated on the Discovery channel. A shepherd walked up to a pen full of different sheep, called to his, they came to the gate and followed him out. Sheep may not know a lot, but they seem to recognize their shepherd’s voice and they know from experience that he takes care of them.

They probably learn from simply doing the same thing day in and day out, a rote action. This guy calls me, I follow along with the rest of the flock, he leads me to wonderful pastures, quiet streams, he protects us from the critters who killed my buddy last year. It’s a pretty good life. All I have to do is walk along with him, eat grass, and rest. There’s no thinking, simply doing.

Which begs the question: do we recognize our shepherd’s voice, do we listen, do we follow? We say that we know Jesus Christ as our personal Savior, we confess it regularly, but unlike sheep, we have enough information, enough experience to not blindly follow anyone. We, including me, have a lot of unanswered questions. We hang back, we wander off, we ask more questions.

Someone confessed to me sometime ago, that a week didn’t go by where they didn’t doubt or question all this spiritual stuff. I think I surprised them by saying I’m right there with you. If I recall, I said that someone who doesn’t have questions from time to time probably isn’t digging deep enough.

I have my questions, I have my doubts. I was a rebellious child, or at least one who questioned everything. I can assure you that I am a questioning adult, possibly a doubting Thomas. I know that I gave my parents fits with questions and arguments, I suspect that I’ve given my heavenly Father fits. I have plenty of unanswered questions, some of them are what I think are pretty good questions. I’ve got answers to some of them, but others I suspect I won’t understand till I get to the other side of the river, and at that point a lot of it won’t matter. I think it’s part of our nature to question, doubt, not trust things.

But what has amazed me over the years is that time and again, He simply responds by saying, “I love you.”

3

“I love you,” what kind of an answer is that? That doesn’t pay the mortgage, put gas in the car, or help my friend who is dying of cancer. “I love you!” “Why?” we ask. “That’s not fair,” we say. “If you love me, why?” We have a thousand questions, most of them, we think, are good questions. I spend a fair amount of time in a given week working alone, don’t think that God and I haven’t had some good arguments. “I love you!”

It’s almost infuriating, because at the end of the day, you know it’s true. He does love us. We can’t understand it, we don’t know why, we can’t control it or dissect it. So we try to either ignore it, change the subject, or run away from it. “I love you!”

And then we wonder why the scriptures are full of comparisons to sheep. “All we like sheep have gone astray. And he shall lead his flock, as a shepherd. I am the good shepherd. I am sending you out like sheep among wolves.” Actually, we act a lot like sheep, very bull-headed or strong-willed sheep. Sheep who think that they know better than their shepherd. Sheep who are prideful enough to think that they know where there is better pasture, or clearer water. Sheep that think that they can out-fox the wolf or the bear. Sheep who hear the shepherd say, “I love you,” and think, “Oh that doesn’t matter, it’s just a silly saying!”

We know enough about our God, our shepherd, to be dangerous. We have heard the stories from the Bible, all the recountings of incredible power and might. We know the creation story, the parting of the Red Sea, the sun standing still, the miracles of Jesus, the tongues of fire at Pentecost. We don’t say it out loud, but we think, “Where is this God?” Why don’t we see miracles like that today? Where is all this healing, huh, huh? Why is my life so empty, so futile? Why am I always broke? I thought you would supply all my needs?

“I love you!” Well, that’s nice, but I can’t eat it!

There’s an old saying: If God seems far off, guess who moved? Maybe the reason His voice sounds so distant is that we have not only wandered off, but run off. Maybe the reason we are hungry, is that He has prepared a table in the presence of our enemies, but we were on yon hill when He did. Maybe one of the reasons that we are sick is that we wouldn’t hold still long enough for him to anoint our heads. 4

Maybe, like the Israelites of Exodus, we didn’t like the pasture He led us to. Maybe we don’t want to hear, “I love you,” because in accepting that premise, we are somehow obligated. Maybe the idea of the one true, all powerful God loving us is more than we can get our heads around, so we pull back. I can’t give a reason for you, but I can give about ten for myself. And once again, we hear it, “I love you!”

Truthfully, it really doesn’t matter what our reasons or questions are, regardless of how well thought out or argued they are. Our wanderings, rebellions, questions, running away, doesn’t change the fact that God still loves us. He loved us so much, that He was willing to sacrifice His Son for our sins and everything that goes along with that. He is, as Jesus talks about in Matthew, willing to leave the flock, to go search high and low to find little old me or you, who one more time has wandered off. And instead of beating us with his rod, like we deserve, He reaches out with his staff, plucks us off that ledge, makes sure that we are alright, and says, “I love you!”

Which leads back to the question: if the Lord is our Shepherd and we do not want, why don’t we order our lives accordingly? Why isn’t this not only the primary driving force of our lives, but the only driving force of our lives?

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

The Lord is our Shepherd! He has prepared a table for us, let’s eat.

5

Psalm 23 (RSV) A Psalm of David.

1 The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want;

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

3   he restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.

4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

    I fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

thou anointest my head with oil, my cup overflows.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  all the days of my life;

and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Matthew 11:28-30 (RSV)

28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”