

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

"A Psalm of Trust"

Scripture: Psalm 23, John 10:11-16

A mighty fortress in our God 315, Be still and know that I am God 64, All the way my Saviour leads me 699, PRAISE: Simply trusting every day by Edgar Stites, JESUS by Chris Tomlin and Ed Cash 2016, The Lord's my shepherd by Stuart Townend 1996

Revised sermon first preached at Kerrisdale Presbyterian on February 21, 2016

July 9, 2017

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Who do you trust?

Who do you rely on?

How about that person sitting next to you?

Take a good look at them.

Do they look trustworthy?

Are they reliable?

Do they make good restaurant recommendations?

Can they keep a secret?

Would you let them pick out a new outfit for you?

Or trust them to re-invest your retirement savings?

How about filling a cavity or extracting a tooth?

Most of our trust in people

Is conditional or limited.

It depends on our relationship with them.

And it depends on our judgement of their abilities.

So let me ask you another question.

Do you have someone in your life

Who is both trustworthy and capable?

Someone who can come to your aid?

PAUSE

Today we continue our survey of the book of psalms

Arriving at the twenty-third Psalm, the Shepherd's Psalm.

Please turn to page 538 of your pew Bible.

The twenty-third Psalm

has been called the "Mona Lisa" of the psalms.

This psalm is probably the most beloved, most admired

Of all the songs in the psalter.

For it speaks honestly of life's trials,

And it speaks confidently of God's care.

In terms of our summer journey through the psalms

It introduces a new category: a psalm of trust.

We can see this from the get-go.

Consider that first verse:

"The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing."<sup>i</sup>

'The Lord is my shepherd, I lack **nothing**.'

Now that's an unequivocal statement of trust!

A person may trust their spouse.

A child might have confidence in their parents.

But how many would offer this endorsement:

"with him/her at my side I don't need a thing!"

The Psalmist makes this bold declaration

And then, using a shepherd and sheep for inspiration,

lays out a number of reasons for this great confidence.

The Psalmist first talks about God's provision:

"He makes me lie down in green pastures,

he leads me beside quiet waters,

he refreshes my soul."<sup>ii</sup>

For the Psalmist, life with God  
 Is a life where all the basic needs are covered:  
 There is food, there is drink,  
 There is time for rest and recovery.

Many of us have experience this provision.  
 How many times in your life  
 have the cupboards have been empty?  
 How many times have you needed to miss a meal?

“As the shepherd supplies all the needs of his sheep,  
 So God supplies the needs of his people.”<sup>iii</sup>

But this provision isn't the only reason for the Psalmist's trust.

The Psalmist also speaks about God's guidance:  
 “He guides me along the right paths  
 for his name's sake....”<sup>iv</sup>

When there are questions about which direction to turn  
 Or which choice to make  
 The Psalmist experiences God's guiding hand.

God helps him make decisions that enhance life,  
 Pushes him in directions that lead to life's flourishing.

Many of us also recognise this good guidance.  
 By the grace of God we've all dodged bullets.  
 Making the right turn we've avoided traffic accidents.  
 Making the right decision  
 we've escaped unhealthy relationships.

Once again it's like the shepherd with his sheep:  
 The shepherd won't let his flock wander and get lost;  
 he guides them for the sake of his own reputation.

The Psalmist talks about God's provision  
 and talks about God's guidance.  
 And then the Psalmist reflects on God's protection:

“Even though I walk through the darkest valley,  
 I will fear no evil, for you are with me;  
 your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”<sup>v</sup>

The Psalmist knows what it is like  
 To be beset by evil,  
 To be surrounded by enemies.

And yet at the same time  
 He has confidence amid the danger.

For the Psalmist recognises that  
 His God is a powerful protector  
 Who will never abandon us, nor let us go.”<sup>vi</sup>

Many of us have experienced this peace, this confidence  
 In the middle of a trial.  
 Maybe during another round of chemo.  
 Or while we're struggling through divorce or bankruptcy.

We too have been given signs that our God is in control.

And so when the wolves howling  
 The sheep can graze with contentment.  
 They know that the shepherd is with them.  
 They know that his rod moves swiftly and powerfully.

In four short verses the Psalmist talks about  
 God's provision and protection  
 And reflects on God's good guidance.

For those of us who are following along  
 It seems like God is caring for his,  
 Caring for our basic needs.

But according to the Psalmist  
 God doesn't just meet the minimum requirements.  
 Despite all the dangers and difficulties  
 The Psalmist is not just eking out a meager existence.

The Psalmist describes his life  
 From end-to-end,  
 as brimming with God's blessing:

"You prepare a table before me  
 in the presence of my enemies.  
 You anoint my head with oil;  
 my cup overflows.

Surely your goodness and love  
 will follow me all the days of my life,  
 and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."<sup>vii</sup>

Taking up the image of a banquet  
 The psalmist speaks of life with God  
 Like a party where the host keeps all the glasses full;  
 Where one delicious course follows another.

Most of us know something  
 Of such abundant mercies.  
 We feel it as we watch the setting sun drop behind the hills,  
 Or as we watch our children/grandchildren  
 frolic in the bathtub.

We experience it  
 As we enjoy homemade ice-cream in the sunshine  
 Or a nice cold beer after a scorching day.

Speaking of life with God  
 The Psalmist concludes that blessing not ill  
 Has always been chasing after him;

That wherever he goes,  
 And whatever he does,  
 he has been hounded with goodness and kindness."<sup>viii</sup>

*Pause*

The twenty-third psalm boldly declares  
 That our God is trustworthy.  
 "The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing."<sup>ix</sup>

Of course we don't **always** share  
 the confidence of the psalmist.

We aren't **always** singing so loudly  
 about God's provision and protection,  
 about God's guidance and blessing.

Sometimes we feel abandoned, overwhelmed by trouble.  
 Sometimes we lament that life is just a series of difficulties,  
 One following another.

Well you can probably imagine  
 That the Psalmist didn't always  
 Feel God's presence so closely,  
 Didn't always experience God's care so acutely.

I mean not too many week ago,  
 We heard the Psalmist lament in Psalm 13:

"How long, O Lord?  
 Will you forget me forever?  
 How long will you hide your face from me?  
 ...How long will my enemy triumph over me?"<sup>x</sup>

I like to imagine that today's Psalm,  
 Was composed on the mountain top,  
 After a long and difficult journey.

I like to imagine that along the way  
 The Psalmist had real questions about God's presence  
 And real concerns about his own survival.

But that at the end of the trip,  
 Looking back over all the journey, all the geography  
 The Psalmist could only conclude  
 That God has been abundantly faithful.

Whether the Psalmist had an unassailable faith  
 Or was a little more like us,  
 The psalm is given to us a present.

For it opens our eyes to anticipate and discern  
 God's provision and protection,  
 God's guidance and blessing,  
 Even in their apparent absence.

By reading this psalm,  
 By singing it,  
 By reciting it prayerfully

We position ourselves in attentive receptivity:  
 We find ourselves looking further down the road  
 Instead of fixating on the shadows lurking around us.

We find ourselves anticipating daybreak  
 Even while the evening lingers.

PAUSE

I would like to invite you to take a moment now to reflect on a time  
 In the past (not the present)  
 Where you faced some great difficulty.

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<sup>i</sup> Psalm 23:1 NIV

<sup>ii</sup> Psalm 23:2 NIV

<sup>iii</sup> Tremper Longman III *Psalms* 135

<sup>iv</sup> Psalm 23:3 NIV

<sup>v</sup> Psalm 23:4 NIV

<sup>vi</sup> See Jeff Paschal "Psalm 23, Pastoral Perspective" Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Feasting on the Word – Year A, Volume 2: Lent through Eastertide.

Maybe it was five years ago.  
 Maybe it was twenty-five.  
 Think about that moment:  
 What was happening  
 and how you were feeling.

Were you anxious, discouraged, afraid?

Now consider how God was present to you  
 In the midst of these troubles.  
 How were you provided for and protected?  
 How were you given guidance?  
 How were you blessed?

If you open your bulletin  
 You will find a space to write a short summary of this experience.  
 Take a moment to fill in the blanks and write out the psalm  
 That describes your life.

Maybe we need to read the Psalms  
 And sing them a little more often.  
 Maybe we need to write our own Psalms  
 And reflect on God's presence with us.

As we recall God's faithfulness in the past  
 We will be given courage for the present.

Amen and amen.

<sup>vii</sup> Psalm 23:5b-6 NRSV

<sup>viii</sup> See Jeff Paschal "Psalm 23, Pastoral Perspective" Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Feasting on the Word – Year A, Volume 2: Lent through Eastertide.

<sup>ix</sup> Psalm 23:1 NIV

<sup>x</sup> Psalm 13:1-2 NIV