

Kerrisdale Presbyterian Church

"Trust"

Scripture: Psalm 23, John 10:11-18

Hymns: Great is thy faithfulness 324, Saviour, like a shepherd lead us 485, Love  
knocks and waits (insert), Your hand, O God, has guided 477

February 21, 2016

Rev. Steve Filyk

Who do you trust?

Who can you rely on?

[Ask congregation members

Whether they trust the person

Sitting next to them.

Why they nod or say yes

Then ask them if they trust the person

To extract a tooth,

Or invest their money,

Or tailor a shirt...]

Our trust of most people is, well, qualified.

We trust them in *certain* ways.

We have confidence that they can accomplish

*Certain* tasks.

But is there anyone or anything

That is utterly reliable?

Someone or something

We can depend on no matter the circumstance?

Today we are continuing our survey of the book of psalms.

Please turn to psalm 23

which is found on page 501 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.

And it is one of the better known

Selections of our Scriptures:

A piece that is recognised by our non-church-going friends.

In terms of our journey through the psalms

It introduces a new category: a psalm of trust.

We can see this from the get-go.

Consider the first verse:

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want."<sup>i</sup>

I like how Eugene Peterson

Renders this verse:

"God, my shepherd!

I don't need a thing."<sup>ii</sup>

God, my shepherd!

I don't need a thing.

Now that's a statement of trust!

A person may trust their spouse.

A child might have confidence in their parents.

But how many would dare make such a blanket endorsement:

"With *insert name* as my spouse, I don't need a thing!"

The psalmist makes this bold declaration

And then, using a shepherd and his sheep for inspiration,

he lays out his reasons for this confidence.

The psalmist talks about God's provision:

"He makes me lie down in green pastures;

He leads me beside still waters;

He restores my soul."<sup>iii</sup>

For the psalmist a life with God  
 Is a life where the needs of life are well-attended to:  
 He has adequate food and drink,  
 And time to rest and recover.

A life with God is like an all-inclusive vacation:  
 the necessities are all there.

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

But that’s not all...

The Psalmist also speaks about God’s guidance:  
 “He leads me in right paths  
 For his name’s sake...”<sup>v</sup>

With God at his side the psalmist finds himself  
 Making decisions that enhance life  
 Instead of choices that diminish life.  
 The psalmist finds himself opting for mercy and justice  
 Instead of vengeance and greed.

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.

But that’s not all...

The Psalmist talks about God’s protection:  
 “Even though I walk through the darkest valley,  
 I fear no evil; for you are with me;  
 Your rod and your staff they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me  
 In the presence of my enemies...”

With God at his side  
 the psalmist has confidence amidst danger.  
 For while the psalmist knows that God is a vulnerable God

Who suffers with us in our sorrow and loss,  
 This same God is also a powerful protector  
 Who will never abandon us,  
 nor let us go.”<sup>vi</sup>

The sheep are able to graze lazily  
 Even when the wolves are howling.

For while they understand  
 That there are predators lurking about,  
 They know their shepherd is vigilant,  
 And that his rod moves swiftly and powerfully.

The psalmist talks about God’s provision and protection.  
 The psalmist also speaks about guidance.

But don’t let that give you the idea  
 That God is only concerned  
 about our basic, elemental needs.

There’s more...

The Psalmist talks about God’s blessing:  
 “you anoint my head with oil;  
 My cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy  
 shall follow me all the days of my life,  
 And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord  
 my whole life long.”<sup>vii</sup>

Shifting images to that of a banquet  
 The psalmist speaks of life with God  
 Like a party where the host is keeping all the wine glasses full;  
 Where after one delicious course finishes  
 Another begins.

Speaking of life with God  
     He says blessing not ill  
         Has always been chasing after him;

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

*Pause*

The twenty-third psalm boldly declares  
     That God is trustworthy.  
         “God, my shepherd!  
             I don’t need a thing.”<sup>ix</sup>

Of course we don’t all share  
     the confidence of the psalmist.  
         Not all of us are singing so loudly  
             about God’s provision and protection,  
                 about God’s guidance and blessing.

At the moment we may feel  
     That we may feel beset by many troubles.  
         We feel like we are in a dark valley utterly alone.

Well you can probably imagine  
     That the psalmist didn’t always  
         Feel God’s presence so closely  
             Nor God’s care so acutely.

(We’ve already explored some psalms of lament.)

This is song was most likely composed  
     On the mountain top  
         As a sort of post-valley reflection.

As such, it can be helpful  
     For those of us who have a present lack in confidence.

For it opens our eyes to anticipate  
     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 scary shadows  
             immediately around us.

We find ourselves anticipating daybreak  
     Even while the evening lingers.

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

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?

Could it be that each one of us could all write a psalm of trust?  
     Maybe we need to sing these songs  
         A little more often: especially in times of challenge.  
             As we recall God’s faithfulness in the past  
                 We will be given courage for the present.

*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 at 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.*

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

<sup>ii</sup> Psalm 23:1 MSG

<sup>iii</sup> Psalm 23:2 NRSV

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

<sup>v</sup> Psalm 23:3 NRSV

<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.

*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.<sup>x</sup>*

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 MSG

<sup>x</sup> Psalm 23 MSG