**Sermon Easter 4A - John 10:1-10: Psalm 23 – 30/4/23**

Sermon Videolink: <https://youtu.be/UQxSXQD7Avs>

“The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want.” (Ps. 23:1, KJV)

“The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing” (NIV).

Many of you probably instantly recognise those words. They are the words that begin Psalm 23, one of the most loved psalms in the Bible. It is a poem that uses the metaphor of God being our shepherd, implying that we are sheep. The Psalm continues with an idyllic vision of a satisfied and well-cared-for sheep, at rest, lying down in a field of lush green pasture. When the sheep needs a drink, the shepherd leads it to safe, pristine, and still waters to drink. Our shepherd God provides us with all we need for our body and life.

The shepherd in this psalm is also concerned with our inner life and how that influences the way that we conduct ourselves. God our shepherd restores our soul. God restores our soul, as we read this Psalm and as we read and hear all of God’s Word. God restores our soul, each time we hear his words of absolution and receive the body and blood of Christ. As God restores our soul, God changes our hearts and minds and guides us into paths of righteousness. That full life God has prepared for us. A life centred on loving relationships with both God and our neighbours.

Psalm 23 is also realistic and recognises that even when God is taking care of us bad things can still happen. We live in a broken world and the psalmist calls the bad things that happen “the valley of the shadow of death” or “the darkest valley” (vs 4). We all have dark valleys, dark valleys that may result from illness, accidents, natural disasters, personal failures, mistakes, bad decisions, relationship troubles and death itself. In all these valleys God is with us ready to comfort us with his guidance and presence.

In the most difficult situations, God is with us sustaining us, blessing us, the one constant good presence in our lives. God wants a relationship with us, preparing a table for us where God sits and dines with us. Psalm 23 is a poem about the full life that God has in store for us, a life that we live now and a life that extends through to eternity when we will dwell at home with God forever.

Today as we hear Jesus speaking about sheep, a gate, and a gatekeeper we are reminded of Psalm 23. Our reading ends at verse 10, but if we read one more verse, in verse 11 Jesus reveals that he is the Good Shepherd. He does so by saying “I am the good shepherd” vs 11. When Jesus says the words “I am” he is clearly implying that he is God the great ‘I am.’ Jesus is God and therefore the same shepherd referred to in Psalm 23. Therefore when we who have faith in Christ read, “The Lord is my Shepherd,” the Lord is Jesus. “Jesus is my shepherd, I shall not want.”

In today’s gospel reading Jesus makes another ‘I am’ statement, saying, “I am the gate” vs 9.

Jesus is using the metaphor of the gate to the sheepfold. Gates keep bad people and dangerous animals out and keep those inside safe from harm. The gate protects the sheep inside the fold, protecting them from thieves and robbers. The gate is the way the sheep enter the fold. The gate is also how the sheep go out into the world, lead out by the gatekeeper, the good shepherd, who takes us into the world to live the full life he has prepared for us to live. Jesus is both the gate and the Good Shepherd.

There is plenty of room in this sheepfold and Jesus is always looking for more sheep to add. As Peter reminds us in his letter today, all of us begin our lives “like sheep going astray “ (1 Peter 2:25, NIV). Jesus the gatekeeper and good shepherd calls us stray sheep by name into his sheepfold. He first called you on the day you were baptised when he called you by name and adopted you into the family of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He continues to call you through God’s word.

Jesus says that the sheep know his voice. There is a sense in which you can recognise someone’s voice by how it sounds, but often it takes more than the sound of someone’s voice to recognise it. It is both the voice and the words that the voice says that help you to know who it is. Remember when Mary met the risen Jesus in the garden? When he first spoke to her, she did not recognise him. This is what happened,

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.”

**16**Jesus said to her, “Mary.”

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic,([D](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+20%3A14-16&version=NIV#cen-NIV-26884D)) “Rabboni!”([E](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+20%3A14-16&version=NIV#cen-NIV-26884E)) (which means “Teacher”) (John 20:14-16, NIV).

It was the familiar way with which Jesus spoke her name that helped Mary to recognise Jesus.

It was the content of the words that Jesus spoke to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus that made their hearts burn. It was the words of blessing he spoke along with the breaking of the bread which finally opened their eyes to whom he was.

The more we listen to God’s word the more we recognise the voice of Jesus the gatekeeper and good shepherd when he calls us into the sheepfold. The more we listen to God’s word the more we recognise and follow our Good Shepherd when he calls us out into the world to live life to the full. The more we listen to God’s word the easier it becomes for us to recognise the voices of the thieves and robbers who may try to drag us away from the shepherd and the sheepfold. Those who promise life to the full when in fact they are offering us a life that is ultimately empty.

The Lord Jesus is our Good Shepherd, and we shall not want. He calls us by name, and he keeps us safe. He walks with us even in the darkest valleys of our lives. He talks to us and the more we listen to him the more we recognise his voice. As we listen he guides us into a life of love where we can experience all the fullness of the life God has prepared for us since the beginning of time. He does not only look after us physically, but he is also the overseer of our souls, which he continually restores with his life-giving word and his own crucified and risen body and blood.

Amen.

Pastor Rolf Lungwitz