

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, APRIL 30, 2023

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

FOURTH SUNDAY of EASTER

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP *(from Psalm 148)*

One: Kings of the earth and all peoples,
princes and all rulers of the earth!
**All: Young men and women alike,
old and young together!**
One: Let them praise the name of the Lord,
for his name alone is exalted;
All: his glory is above earth and heaven.

***OPENING HYMN** “Crown Him with Many Crowns” GtG 268

1. **Crown him with many crowns,
the Lamb upon his throne;
hark, how the heavenly anthem drowns
all music but its own!
Awake, my soul, and sing
of him who died for thee,
and hail him as thy matchless King
through all eternity.**
2. **Crown him the Lord of love;
behold his hands and side,
rich wounds, yet visible above,
in beauty glorified:
no angel in the sky
can fully bear that sight,
but downward bends his burning eye
at mysteries so bright.**

(continued...)

3. **Crown him the Lord of peace,
whose power a scepter sways
from pole to pole, that wars may cease,
absorbed in prayer and praise.
His reign shall know no end;
and round his pierced feet
fair flowers of paradise extend
their fragrance ever sweet.**

4. **Crown him the Lord of years,
the potentate of time;
creator of the rolling spheres,
ineffably sublime.
All hail, Redeemer, hail!
For thou hast died for me;
thy praise shall never, never fail
throughout eternity.**

Words: Matthew Bridges, 1851. *Public Domain.*

Music: DIADEMATA, George Job Elvey, 1868. *Public Domain.*

UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

**O Lord, we sing your praises,
but fail to follow.
We want you to watch over us,
but we don't want to heed your wisdom.
We want you to provide for our lives,
but not to pry into our lives.
Forgive us, gracious Lord,
when we use you and fail to worship you.
Turn our hearts to you.
Turn our wills to your path.
Transform our lives as obedient children, following the Risen Lord,
in whose name we pray. Amen.**

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

One: Christ bore our sins that we might die to sin and live in righteousness.
All: **In ways we cannot fathom, Christ's wounds have extended healing to us.**
One: Let us live as whole people, forgiven and forgiving...
All: **...rising with Christ to a life made new.**

THE PEACE

One: The peace of Christ be with you.

All: And also with you.

(From your seat, a brief sign of peace may be shared: a wave of the hand, a nod of the head, etc.)

THE WORD

SCRIPTURE READINGS Psalm 23
Revelation 7:9-17

PSALM 23

One: The Lord is my shepherd;

All: I shall not be in want.

One: You make me lie down in green pastures

All: and lead me beside still waters.

One: You revive my soul

All: and guide me along right pathways for your name's sake.

One: Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

All: I shall fear no evil;

for you are with me;

your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

One: You spread a table before me in the presence of those who trouble me;

All: you have anointed my head with oil,

and my cup is running over.

One: Surely your goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,

All: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Today's translation of Psalm 23 is reprinted by permission from *Book of Common Worship*, © 1993 Westminster/John Knox Press.

REVELATION 7:9-17 (New Revised Standard Version)

⁹ *After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands.* ¹⁰ *They cried out in a loud voice, saying,*

*“Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne,
and to the Lamb!”*

¹¹ And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² singing,

*“Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom
and thanksgiving and honor
and power and might
be to our God forever and ever! Amen!”*

¹³ Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?” ¹⁴ I said to him, “Sir, you are the one that knows.” Then he said to me, “These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

*¹⁵ For this reason they are before the throne of God,
and worship God day and night within God’s temple,
and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them.*

*¹⁶ They will hunger no more, and thirst no more;
the sun will not strike them,
nor any scorching heat;*

*¹⁷ for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd,
and he will guide them to springs of the water of life,
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”*

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON “A Package Deal” by Pastor Bill Vincent

Get ready to respond...



Isn't it sweet.

The warm, fuzzy response to the image found in Psalm 23.

"The Lord is my shepherd" - who takes care of us.

-who makes us *"lie down in green pastures"* and leads us *"beside still waters"*
- offering us rest and calm.

-who *"revives my soul"* and guides us *"along right pathways"*
- restoring and revitalizing us, and directing us with confidence and clarity.

-even as we *"walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we fear no evil, for the Lord is with us, with rod and staff"*

- comforting us, assuring us.

-*"spreading a table before us"*

- with the bounty of God's goodness.

God cares for us, watches over us, protects us, provides for us.

With family and friends; home and food; present with us, loving us; teaching us how to live.

Yes! This is good!

Of course, we have to remember that...

...sheep are pretty stupid,



with a dull look on their face.

What does that say about us?

If the Lord is my shepherd, that makes me the Lord's sheep. That means I can be pretty...

Oh!

Someone once noted,

Most sheep owners will tell you that sheep are not just fluffy, cuddly, and cute. In fact, they're fairly difficult to raise. Sheep are creatures of habit. Left alone, they will graze over the same worn-out spot of grass until they eat right down through the roots and destroy the grass completely. ...

[You know, doing the same thing over and over again, expecting different results: the very definition of 'crazy'. Stuck in a rut: "If we open the door, they will come in!"]

Furthermore, [sheep] can be skittish and easily spooked. A piece of paper blowing in the wind can scatter a whole flock of sheep. ...

[Anxious? With the slightest change: "The sky is falling!" "You can't move that chair!" "You can't change the schedule for Sunday morning!"]

These seemingly timid animals can be cruel, with the stronger ones biting and butting the weaker ones. ...

[Bullying...and we're not immune in the church. "If we talk louder – talk about others behind their back; ridicule them and their ideas, and call them names, with biting sarcasm – we can keep 'those people' in line!"]

Sheep are greedy. They'll see a tuft of grass and push into a clump of thorn bushes to get it. In the process, they can get their long coats tangled in the thorns and become permanently caught – and eventually starve to death. ...

["Gotta have it!" "Mine!" "Don't touch!" "This is our church building; you can't use it!"]

[Sheep] stray too. A sheep will keep its head down, nibbling at tufts of grass, moving further and further away from the safety of the flock, until it is completely lost or in danger. They will even follow a line of grass right over the edge of a cliff! ...

[Straying a little bit at a time: “No one will know!” “It won’t make a difference!” “No big deal!” ... “Wait a minute: how did I get so far away?”]

(Alex Gondola, “Good Shepherd Seeking Sheep”; in *Lectionary Homiletics*, April-May 2007, p.47)

Not a very flattering picture, is it? ... of the sheep, I mean. (wink! wink!)

You see, there is a sterner, challenging side to this image of the Lord as my shepherd.

For the Lord is not simply a shepherd that revives our soul. The Lord is a shepherd that “*makes us lie down in green pastures*” ...whether we want to or not.

Because sometimes we’re pretty stupid, and don’t know a good green pasture when we see one, and don’t know when we need to lie down and rest to revive our soul.

Like the time in college when some friends “kidnapped” me because they were convinced I really did need to take a break, and rest.

The first verse of the psalm is typically translated:

*“The Lord is my shepherd,
I shall not want.”*

It means, “I shall not be in want,” “I shall want for nothing.”

But, you know, there are times – with this meddlesome shepherd – that we really don’t want this shepherd Lord.

“The Lord is my shepherd, / I do not want.”

When we’re called to share, and we don’t want to.

When we’re supposed to be peacemakers, and not always get our own way.

When we’re supposed to control our anger and be kind toward others.

When we are to treat others with respect, even when they’re ‘dissing’ us.

When we need to put our greed and pride aside, and serve others.

“The Lord is my shepherd, / I do not want.”

But it’s a package deal: not one without the other, but both together.

You can’t have the shepherd without the Lord.

W. Eugene March, former professor at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, puts it succinctly:

To celebrate God’s pastoral guidance is at the same time to acknowledge [God] as Ruler. (*Basic Bible Study*, p.59)

Ruler: not just over those people over there, but Ruler over me.

The shepherd Lord is both a comfort and a challenge.

We tend to think of Psalm 23 as picturing the comfort, though the challenge is there, too. But it is our passage from Revelation that really lifts up the challenge and brings it home.

This wondrous picture of heaven and the heavenly court. And as we hear the songs of praise and read of all those around the throne bowing down to worship, we hear an invitation for us, too, to bow down and worship.

But remember: we do not bow down before just anyone.

Oh, there are those people, causes, and even things around us that would love to have us bow down and worship them, giving them ultimate allegiance in our lives.

But we are not to bow down before just anyone.

We bow down before one who is worthy of worship.

The Lamb of God is worthy of worship.

For the Lamb of God is not meek and mild and sheepish. The Lamb of God is the Lord: the Victor, triumphant over all, including over us.

The Lamb of God is the Shepherd who not only heals our wounds, but expects us to heed his word.

The Lamb of God is the Shepherd who not only comforts, but also confronts.

...who not only protects, but also prods.

...who not only is the reason for our life, but also the Ruler of our life.

"The Lord is my shepherd."?

Oh yes!

Oh no!

For the Shepherd is not only trustworthy, but also expects to be trusted – by us: expects, when he calls our name, for us to follow.

So that wherever the Shepherd leads, we go.

Even if it be to a place we do not want to go.

Even if it be through a valley of deep, dark, frightening shadows.

Like that challenge we'd just as soon not face.

Like that lesson we don't want to learn.

Like that future that un-nerves us.

For even here, in this deep, dark, frightening valley,

your goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.

Even here, in this deep, dark, frightening valley,

the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, / and...will guide them

to springs of the water of life, / and...will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

For, yes, the challenging Lord will comfort us, just as the comforting Shepherd will challenge us.

The Lord IS my Shepherd.

The Shepherd IS my Lord.

Thanks be to God!

***HYMN** “Savior, like a Shepherd Lead Us” GtG 187

1. **Savior, like a shepherd lead us;
much we need your tender care.
In your pleasant pastures feed us;
for our use your fold prepare.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
you have bought us: we are yours.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
you have bought us: we are yours.**

2. **We are yours: in love befriend us;
be the guardian of our way.
Keep your flock: from sin defend us;
seek us when we go astray.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
hear your children when we pray.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
hear your children when we pray.**

3. **You have promised to receive us,
poor and sinful though we be;
you have mercy to relieve us,
grace to cleanse, and power to free.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
early let us turn to you.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
early let us turn to you.**

4. **Early let us seek your favor;
early let us do your will.
Blessed Lord and only Savior,
with your love our spirits fill.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
you have loved us; love us still.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
you have loved us; love us still.**

Words: Thrupp's *Hymns for the Young*, 1836, alt. *Public Domain*.

Music: BRADBURY, William Batchelder Bradbury, 1859, alt. *Public Domain*.

***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH** (*The Apostles' Creed*)

(*next page...*)

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

Today's translation of the Apostles' Creed is reprinted by permission
from *Book of Common Worship*, © 1993 Westminster/John Knox Press.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

One: In your great love for us...
All: ...hear our prayer.

THE LORD'S PRAYER (Traditional)

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever. Amen.**

OFFERING

Invitation

Reflection

**Unison Prayer of Dedication*

Dear God, we thank you for your sustaining power in our lives. You urge us on and provide for us in life. Teach us the way of thankfulness. We offer these gifts, and our lives, as we acknowledge your gifts to us and respond with gratitude. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “He Leadeth Me: O Blessed Thought!”

**1. He leadeth me: O blessed thought!
O words with heavenly comfort fraught!
Whate'er I do, where'er I be,
still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me.**

Refrain:

**He leadeth me, he leadeth me;
by his own hand he leadeth me:
his faithful follower I would be,
for by his hand he leadeth me.**

**2. Sometimes 'mid scenes of deepest gloom,
sometimes where Eden's flowers bloom,
by waters calm, o'er troubled sea,
still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me.**

Refrain:

**3. Lord, I would clasp thy hand in mine,
nor ever murmur nor repine;
content, whatever lot I see,
since 'tis my God that leadeth me.**

Refrain:

**4. And when my task on earth is done,
when, by thy grace, the victory's won,
e'en death's cold wave I will not flee,
since God through Jordan leadeth me.**

Refrain:

Words: Joseph H. Gilmore, 1862. *Public Domain.*

Music: HE LEADETH ME, William B. Bradbury, 1864. *Public Domain.*

***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

One: ...And let the gathered people of God say...

All: ...Amen.

***RESPONSE** “God Be with You Till We Meet Again” GtG 541/542 (*Verse 1*)

**1. God be with you till we meet again;
loving counsels guide, uphold you,
with a shepherd's care enfold you:
God be with you till we meet again.**

Words: Jeremiah Eames Rankin, 1880, alt. *Public Domain.*

#541 Music: RANDOLPH, Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1906. *Public Domain.*

#542 Music: GOD BE WITH YOU, William G. Tomer, 1880. *Public Domain.*

POSTLUDE

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