

“Celebrating Enough”

Message by DD Adams

Providence United Methodist Church

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The epistle lesson for today is taken from 1 John, chapter 3, verses 16 through 18. I'll be reading from The Message. This is how we've come to understand and experience love: Christ sacrificed his life for us. This is why we ought to live sacrificially for our fellow believers, and not just be out for ourselves. If you see some brother or sister in need and have the means to do something about it but turn a cold shoulder and do nothing, what happens to God's love? It disappears. And you made it disappear. My dear children, let's not just talk about love; let's practice real love.

The Old Testament lesson is Psalm 23. I'll be reading from the New Revised Standard Version. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. 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; 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. This is God's word for God's people. Thanks be to God.

Psalm 23 is a psalm of David. He writes about the Good Shepherd who cares for his sheep, and prepares and calls them for ministry. Jesus likens his followers to sheep. Jesus is the shepherd who leads his sheep, provides food, and protects them. In 1 Peter, the Lord calls believers “my sheep” because he laid down his life for them. In Psalm 23, Jesus is the source upon everything we receive.

Shepherd means herder of sheep, and sheep are a very needy bunch. For them to be happy and feel secure they have to know their Shepherd is near. The first three verses prove that. Listen to them again. “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name’s sake.” ***“I shall not want” means I’ll never be in need of anything.***

“He makes me lie down in green pastures.” Sheep will absolutely refuse to lie down and rest if they’re afraid. Or if flies and parasites are tormenting them they can’t rest and fall asleep. It doesn’t take anything for them to scatter, run and start a stampede. Just a jackrabbit can cause an entire flock to run and divide itself. The greatest comfort a Christian has is knowing that God’s presence is constantly in their midst. Sheep look up to their Shepherd and need his guidance.

A good shepherd will always have plenty of oil on hand; it’s used for all kinds of things. It’s an insect repellent, and when the sheep decide to rearrange their “pecking order” based on size and age, in our case age, the Shepherd pours oil on their heads and horns so when they try to fight with each other they simply slide off of each other’s heads and horns. Sheep love the oil.

When the Shepherd applies the oil to each sheep to bring healing to the flock there’s contentment that heals and soothes. So when Christians receive God’s love and give it to others in their flock there’s peace and harmony. Sheep love the oil—for us—we love and need the Holy Spirit in order to coexist and prosper as a church family.

“He leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.” Our Shepherd leads us gently. A shepherd can’t drive sheep. Sheep can only be led. They hear their Shepherd’s voice, but they’re the ones who must follow. Sheep won’t drink water from a fast moving stream. They’re afraid. They need still water that’s peaceful

and easy to drink from in order to fulfill their thirst. We as Christians need to hear and read the word of God—for we thirst for that pure water from the Lord.

The Good Shepherd leads the sheep to good grazing grounds, and they rise early in the morning or maybe late at night or maybe during their lunch hour. But Christians must feed and have that spiritual nourishment that God's word provides, but it takes a willing heart to do that.

“He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.” Sheep are notorious creatures of habit. Sometimes they decide to explore on dangerous paths, and it can get them into trouble. We, as likened to sheep, have a Wonderful Counselor who is always present and willing to lead us, but we must look up to be led.

The central verse of this psalm is verse 4, “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.” Sheep don't like the dark just like us. We need to feel as though we know where we're going and that the ground is sturdy and smooth underneath. In order to gain higher ground spiritually we must climb the mountain to higher ground. That's only possible by walking through the dark and difficult valleys, but our Shepherd walks with us.

In order for the Shepherd to get the sheep to the top of the mountain he must lead them through the dark valleys that wind themselves persistently to the top. The sheep that stay closest to their Shepherd when they're walking through the dark valleys will feel the most at peace. It's the dark valleys that transform the Christian. We have to stay close to God. We have to look up. Only through trusting your Shepherd do you begin to find out through life experience that the Good Shepherd can lead you to find refreshment right smack dab in the middle of your difficulty.

The Good Shepherd protects, but he doesn't always remove us from danger. He does help us to overcome enemies. As the shepherd lies each night at the door of the sheepfold, he gives thanks to God for the day and how he's been blessed—for he knows that goodness and mercy follow him. He's looking up.

Okay, so we know the Lord provides and cares and lead and protects us The question I ask is this, what are we doing with the provision, caring, leading, and protection the Good Shepherd is giving us?

We're a consumer-oriented culture in America. We're blasted 24/7 by media and advertising telling us we need more of this and that. We get seduced and think our happiness and our children's happiness and security depends on what the world can give us. We're not recognizing that God through Jesus Christ has already provided our need. We worry about everything. Do we have enough money, will we make it, what's the stock market doing, I need another pair of shoes.

We have a mindset of scarcity rather than confessing what God has already blessed us with and will bless us with. We have an attitude of scarcity—instead of—an attitude of gratefulness. We think in terms of deficits rather than how blessed we are. Oh we may acknowledge our blessings, but we turn right around and complain about others and what we need rather than praying for what God has already promised us. I'm not just talking about material things here friends.

For example, at a church council meeting I suggest we thank God and celebrate all that we've accomplished with God and all God will do in the future for our church. Let's celebrate that God is blessing us more than enough. When we do that, our mind turns and goes to the faith side—the cup is then half full—the cup is actually overflowing!! Psalm 23 invites us to celebrate having more than enough. We celebrate what God is doing and will do. And as we pray, we hold God to his word to “provide all of our need according to his riches in glory in

Christ Jesus as Philippians 4:19 states. Resolve your wanting and say this: “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” Amen. “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” Amen. “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” Amen.

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Let’s pray. Good Shepherd, take our lives and show us daily your desire to have us follow you as you lead us faithfully. Help us change our mindset of scarcity to one that sees the glass overflowing. Move in us to stop complaining and to start praying and thanking God in advance for his many blessings. Amen.