

June 12, 2022 Sermon: The Brokenness of Being without a Leader by Pastor Jenn

Scripture: Psalm 23 & John 10:11-17

Brokenness- we look around us and we see it time and time again. People broken physically with illness and ailments. People broken emotionally with suicide rates up, mental health claims on the rise, and sadly gun violence. People broken spiritually, feeling lost and cut off from God. And yet each Sunday you and I come into this sanctuary, bringing our brokenness, and God offers us mending and healing. Further as we sit here, we recognize we are surrounded by brokenness with the stain glass windows, but put those broken pieces together, and the beauty they create are breathtaking.

For the next two months we are going to be looking at the stain glass windows of this church and be inspired not only by their beauty but their meaning. Some of you may have one of these: Stained Glass Windows of the Sanctuary booklet published in 2003. Hear the preface: “As we view these windows they become devotional aids for a closer walk with Christ. As we enter the sanctuary, we are surrounded by the images of grace evident in these biblical stories. They are windows of the soul that open to the reality of God’s love for the world and the promise of eternal life for all who receive this divine love” – Rev. James T. Dawes & Rev. Gregory Rapp 11/2003

The first one we will start with is the one where Jesus is the Good Shepherd. It was presented by Mr. & Mrs. George P Shearer. Many theologians have stated that to truly grasp the statement of Jesus being the Good Shepherd we should start with the 23rd Psalm to understand this concept because the more we know how a shepherd leads and cares for his flock, and the more we recognize how we are sheep that need caring for, and guided, the more we will be amazed at God’s leading for us through Jesus.

Let’s look at this psalm. Psalm 23 is attributed to David, who was a shepherd before becoming Israel’s beloved king. And we can imagine that in reflection of his own life, David recognizes the work he was called to do previously as a shepherd can correlate to the work he knows God does for each of us, each and every single day.

At the beginning David states, *The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.* As a child I use to think what a harsh line, saying God is my shepherd, but I don’t want that. It can be heard that way, but that’s not what it means. It means with the Lord we will need nothing, because the Lord will provide all that we need. And with that line David then continues the Psalm proving that.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: Do you know sheep will walk continuously unless they are told to lay down by their shepherd? Usually their grazing time begins around 4am and in 6 hours they become hot, tired, and thirsty. But if they would drink when their stomachs are full, which it would be after 6 hours of grazing, they would get sick. So to help the sheep keep what they have, the shepherd will make the sheep lie down in green pastures, that is cool, soft spots to digest. In this line, David is claiming that the Lord will lead us to rest. Personally, I believe that is what the Sabbath is for, to rest our hearts, our minds, our bodies, our souls. Because the Lord will take care of us when we won’t, to make certain we get the rest we need to continue in our journeys.

Next: *He leadeth me beside the still waters, he restoreth my soul.* Because of its heavy coat of wool, sheep are poor swimmers. Therefore they will not drink from running water for fear of being pulled into the water and drowning. Sheep will only drink from still waters and if the shepherd cannot find still waters for the sheep, he creates it. The shepherd will seek out rocks and place them in an area close to the water to form still waters for the sheep to drink from. In this line David claims the Lord won’t push us beyond our own fears, no instead God will restore us with gentleness and compassion with a Living Water that restores our souls.

Moving on, *He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.* Sheep have poor eyesight, they cannot see beyond 15 yards. And in Israel if you are not paying attention to where you are going, you could end up going over a cliff. Which is common for sheep, they don’t pay attention to what is before them, so sheep follow their shepherd, trusting the shepherd knows the good and right way. If we choose to follow the

Lord our Shepherd, David claims we will be safe, we will be directed to the right path, the path the Lord leads us on.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; In Palestine there is an actual valley known as the shadow of death. It leads from Jerusalem to the Dead Sea and it is very narrow and dangerous as it weaves it's way through the mountain range. The path is rough-but the sheep will not fear so long as the shepherd is with them. Here David is reiterating the fact that whatever pathway we find ourselves on, through pain, through uncertainty, loneliness, even death, do not fear because the Lord is with us.

David then states: *Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.* There are 2 tools a shepherd carries with them: a rod and a staff. The rod provides protection as a weapon; it is a heavy hard club 2-3 feet long. The staff is about 8 feet long and its end was turned into a crook. If they are traveling and the sheep lose their footing and slip down a ledge, the shepherd will grab onto the sheep and pull it back to safety. Brings to light the true interpretation of "Spare the rod, spoil the child" Proverbs 13:24 - it means if you do not lead and guide the child, protecting them, the child will become spoiled, not pampered, but the other interpretation, like spoiled fruit, if we do not protect our children, they will get hurt. It's our job to protect them. Just as David teaches us it is the shepherd's role to lead and protect.

David continues, *Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies;* In the Holy Lands, there are various plants that grow on the pastures that if eaten by the sheep, can be fatal. There are also thorns that could harm the sheep. Each spring the shepherds would dig out those enemies, those plants and thorns and pile them up and burn them. So the pastures were safe for the sheep. The Lord knows our enemies, knows what works to destroy us, and the Lord is at work to save us.

And he prepares a way for us that leads to healing: *Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.* As the sheep travel, they still may get bumped, bruised, scratched, scraped. When they come into the gate of their fold, the shepherd will examine the sheep one by one and if there is a cut or scrape, the shepherd will place oil on the cut to heal the sheep. The shepherd will also provide water for the sheep to drink as they come in, usually using a big cup, they would fill the cup and offer the sheep the water.

Which all leads to: *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

Now do you see why it is so important to understand this Psalm to better understand the statement Jesus gives as being the Good Shepherd? Because Jesus is our Shepherd. He is our Lord and in him we shall not want for anything. He is our protector, defender, our healer, our savior, our friend. Furthermore, he leads us, he leads all of us if we follow his guidance, and trust in his caring for us.

The next time you feel broken, come sit in this sanctuary and look upon that window, recognizing Jesus the Good Shepherd will lead you and bless you by his beauty. Jesus says, ¹⁴*I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me.* May it be so my friends, may it be so.

Let us pray: Good and loving shepherd, feed us with your love, tend to us with your care, lead us to life with you. Amen.