**Psalm 23;  1 John 3: 16-24;  John 10: 11-18**

**Sermon:  “Enfolded by Love”**

**Psalm 23**

**Revised Standard Version.**

**23** The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want;  
**2**     he makes me lie down in green pastures.  
He leads me beside still waters;  
**3**     he restores my soul.  
He leads me in paths of righteousness  
    for his name’s sake.

**4** Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
    I fear no evil;  
for thou art with me;  
    thy rod and thy staff,  
    they comfort me.

**5** Thou preparest a table before me  
    in the presence of my enemies;  
thou anointest my head with oil,  
    my cup overflows.  
**6** Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
    all the days of my life;  
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord  
    for ever.

**Commentary:**

Psalm 23 is one of the most familiar and beloved in all the world.  It is particularly comforting at the time of loss, thus used at many funeral services.  It is filled with promise, hope and eternal love which makes it attractive to nearly every human being!  I have heard of families using it at the service for a beloved infant when they had no clergy or anyone else in an official religious role.  They simply had someone read Psalm 23.  In many ways that seems most fitting to me, what else could be said, what more needs to be spoken than these few simple, yet profound, words?

I have read it when beloved members lie close to death.  They seem to welcome the deep faith of the “old-time religion” captured in this rendering of God’s word.  I remember memorizing Psalm 23 as a youth.  The words only seem to grow in terms of importance, addressing life’s needs and relevant truth—more and more each year!   “Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me.  Thy rod an Thy staff, they comfort me.”  These are perhaps the most powerful words in all the Psalms.  It would do us well to memorize such scripture today and bring it to mind often throughout the day as the burdens of life start to wear us down.

And to know that Christ the Lord is himself our Good Shepherd! Amen.

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**1 John 3: 16-24 (RSV)**

**16** By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. **17** But if any one has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? **18** Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth.

**19**By this we shall know that we are of the truth, and reassure our hearts before him **20** whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. **21** Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God; **22** and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. **23** And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. **24** All who keep his commandments abide in him, and he in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us.

**Commentary:**

1 John is a wonderful letter that contains and shares some of the most profound insights of the whole Bible!  Here the author emphasizes the importance of Christ’s redemptive death for us.  It is also expressed that we, too, are called to this same degree of faith and action.  In fact, if our actions do not match our words, our faith is a sham.  This is the ancient version of the modern poetic instructions on how not to be a hypocrite—“If you talk the talk, you must walk the walk.”

Beloved, this is the proof of our faith, when our deeds match the words and the teaching of Christ—“The proof of the pudding of a true believer!”

…Simple, yet true.

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**John 10:11-18**

**Revised Standard Version**

**11** I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. **12** He who is a hireling and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. **13** He flees because he is a hireling and cares nothing for the sheep. **14**I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, **15** as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. **16** And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd. **17** For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. **18** No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again; this charge I have received from my Father.”

**Commentary:**

What a perfect bookend to Psalm 23!  Jesus is, indeed, our Good Shepherd who leads us all the way through life.  He promises us eternal life through His love which knows no end.  Christ is the One who has gone through the pangs of death on our behalf—Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me!  Jesus knows it all, Jesus paid it all, and Jesus has come through it all to open the gateway to heaven for us.  How can the creature say “Thanks?”

“Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies”—how beautifully and perfectly it speaks of the great banquet on high that Jesus prepares and the Last Supper that He shared with His disciples and the “enemy” who would betray Him.

The Bible is so good, the gospel is so beautiful we could dwell upon it forever.  God’s word is sweet as honey and so wonderful that persons of faith from of old have said they would figuratively and literally eat it!

This is our life…to live in the goodness and glory and power and promise of the living word of God.

Thanks be to God for our amazing faith!

Pastor Austin