

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**  
 East Moline, Illinois  
 Pastor Becky Sherwood  
**April 21, 2024, 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Easter**  
 Psalm 23 (used in the liturgy), John 10:22-30  
**LISTEN, A VOICE IS CALLING YOU**

To start this sermon, you are going to need pen or a pencil. If you don't have one, there should be a pencil in front of you by the hymnals, or a pen in the friendship book, or borrow one from a neighbor who has four at the bottom of her purse. Take a minute to find something to write with. You'll also need the bulletin inserts, the Psalm 23 and the yellow half-sheet of paper that are in your bulletins for the sermon. If you are watching at home you'll need a blank piece of paper. OK, now on to the sermon.

This morning, we are going to step back into the 500's for the beginning of the sermon. There is a spiritual practice for listening to the Bible and listening to God speaking to us called Lectio Divina, which literally means "divine reading." Christians have been using this way of listening to God since the 6<sup>th</sup> century. We aren't going to practice all its steps this morning. But I'm going to invite you to take the copy of Psalm 23, and turn to the side that is in the King James Version. I'm going to read it to you and if you are comfortable, I'm going to ask you to listen with your eyes closed, or if you prefer you can read along.

In Lectio Divina you are invited to listen for a word or phrase that catches your attention, that speaks to your heart, that feels like God is speaking directly to you. That is the gift of the Bible, that its words are for each of us. This morning you are invited to listen to Psalm 23, knowing that it is a gift from God to you. Even though the words may be familiar, try to listen with new ears. With your eyes closed, or reading along, listen for the word or phrase that catches your heart or your attention this morning:

**Psalm 23, King James Version**

**23** The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. <sup>2</sup>He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. <sup>3</sup>He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. <sup>4</sup>Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. <sup>5</sup>Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. <sup>6</sup>Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

Now, circle the word or phrase where you heard God speaking to you in Psalm 23. If you are at home write down that word or phrase. Sit for a moment with that word or phrase that God has given to you today.

We will come back to this later in the sermon.

When our Confirmation classes have met through the years we start each class the same way. First, we light a candle to symbolize the presence of Jesus in our midst. Then there are three questions that we take turns answering:

What were the high points in your life from the past week?

What were low points in your life from the past week?

Where have you seen God in the past week?

These three simple questions give us a way to check in with each other, and the “where have you seen God?” question helps us to look at the everyday ways that God shows up in our lives.

This morning’s scripture readings ask us to add another question to these three, so that we are asked this morning not only “where have you seen God in the past week?”, but “where have you heard Jesus speaking?”

When Jesus was teaching the disciples and the crowds, he used things from their world to help them understand the ways that God was active in their lives. He was speaking to people who loved Psalm 23 as much as we do... “The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want...”

And he was speaking to people that, for the most part, knew everything there was to know about shepherds and sheep:

They knew that when Jesus said: “I am the good shepherd, my sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me,” he was referring to the ways that shepherds cared for their sheep.

Shepherds led their flocks to green pastures where they could eat good and healthy food, and be free from starvation.

Shepherds led their sheep beside still waters because sheep will only drink water that isn’t fast moving. It is only when they feel safe beside calm waters that they will feel safe enough to quench their thirst.

Sheep could only sleep in the green pastures when they felt completely safe, and shepherds kept watch, protecting the sheep from the attacks of wolves and other predators.

A shepherd’s rod was a thick stick used as a defensive weapon against predators, and the staff helped guide the sheep along. The staff often had a hooked end that was used to pull sheep back from danger, or to pull them out of some place where they had gotten stuck.

At the end of each day shepherds would gather their sheep into stone pens, often sharing that space with other shepherds and flocks out on the hillsides.

Shepherds knew their sheep by name, and as each one passed into the pen at night the shepherd would check that sheep or lamb for any sign of injury, or infection, or lameness.

Then one or more of the shepherds would sleep in front of the open end of the pen, protecting and keeping watch over the sheep throughout the night. It was this practice that led Jesus to say that not only was he the Good Shepherd, but he was the Gate for the Sheep, he was the protection against all trouble.

In the early morning as the shepherds prepared to take their individual flocks back up into the hills, each would stand at the opening to the pen. They would call to their sheep, and their own sheep would recognize the voice of their shepherd. Only the sheep of their flock would separate themselves from the others and come out to the shepherd.

In this morning’s reading from John, Jesus says: “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father’s hand.”

With these echoes of Psalm 23 Jesus was telling them, and telling us, that once we belong to the Good Shepherd we will be loved and cared for, for all eternity. No predator, no enemy, no evil can snatch us away from the love of God that is for each one of us in Jesus.

But I don’t think this lets us off the hook when it comes to being responsible for following

Jesus. “Where do you see God?”, and “Where do you hear Jesus speaking?” still need to be daily questions in our lives, and daily guides for how we live.

Wouldn't it be great if following Jesus was as easy as hearing his voice on a quiet hillside as he stood in front of us calling us by name? But we don't live in a world where silence is the norm. We need to hear Jesus calling to us in a very different world from that of the Bible times.

In my last church I was preaching a sermon about spending time in silence so that we could hear Jesus speaking to us. For the children's sermon I told the children we were going to try to be quiet for 30 seconds so we could think about Jesus. I told them, and the adults, that it takes practice to be quiet for a long time and so sometimes it helps to start with little bits of time.

I told the children that we were going to close our eyes and think about Jesus being with us and I would tell them when the time was up.

I joined them in closing my eyes and we settled into silence.

Now what I couldn't see because my eyes were closed was that one of our three-year-olds thought that there was definitely something wrong with being this quiet.

And it was especially upsetting that his pastor was just standing there with her eyes closed doing absolutely nothing.

So, in the blink of an eye, he got to his feet, ran at me, punched me in the stomach with both hands, and yelled at the top of his lungs, “WAKE UP!”

Shall we just say that I wasn't thinking about the love of Jesus in that moment, because he scared me to death, and I was just so thankful that I didn't swear out loud!

And the congregation was laughing too hard to think about anything spiritual!

We live in a world that continually punches us in the stomach and tells us to “WAKE UP!” in a hundred different voices, don't we? There are so many voices!

Meanwhile this morning's passage from John, and the comforting words of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm reminds us that Jesus continues to speak too, calling us by name, and asking us to follow.

This is where the yellow piece of paper in your bulletin comes in. I invite you to take it out, and grab your pencil or pen.

I invite you to take a minute or two and begin to list all the voices calling “WAKE UP!” to you, positive and negative voices that call for your attention in a given week. What are the high points and low points of voices in your life.

Think about your schedule of appointments, the things you read and listen to, news and pod casts and music and TikTok

The voices of friends and family, parents who are still alive, or now Home in Heaven, and influencers and twitter, now X

Take a few minutes and write down all those voices calling “Wake Up!.”

Don't forget your own voice, and maybe that internal critic.

Have you included the voices of those who encourage you and those who pull you down, the voices from the news, the voices from your devotions, voices from your social gatherings, voices from nature and pets, and your medical team...

Have you included the voices of your fears, your dreams, your doubts, your joys  
I'll give you a little longer to record the voices who fill your life.

Now we are going to return to Psalm 23, this time reading it from the Message translation. Again, I am going to invite you to listen with your eyes closed, or you may read along, whichever is

comfortable for you. You are once again invited to listen for a word or phrase that catches your attention, that speaks to your heart, that feels like God is speaking directly to you. Psalm 23, and all of scripture, is a gift from God to you. With your eyes closed, or reading along, listen for the word or phrase that catches your heart or your attention this morning:

### **Psalm 23, The Message**

**23** <sup>1-3</sup> GOD, my shepherd! I don't need a thing. You have bedded me down in lush meadows, you find me quiet pools to drink from. True to your word, you let me catch my breath and send me in the right direction. <sup>4</sup> Even when the way goes through Death Valley, I'm not afraid when you walk at my side. Your trusty shepherd's crook makes me feel secure. <sup>5</sup> You serve me a six-course dinner right in front of my enemies. You revive my drooping head; my cup brims with blessing. <sup>6</sup> Your beauty and love chase after me every day of my life. I'm back home in the house of GOD for the rest of my life.

Now once again put a circle around the word or phrase where you heard God speaking to you in Psalm 23. Sit for a moment with this word or phrase that God has given to you. And now look at the word or phrase on the other side. Sit with these two messages from God to you today.

In your hand you now have two pieces of paper one is a list of voices that fill your days. It isn't a bad list. Its just a list of how much is going on in your life and how many voices there are. In your other hand is two ways that God has spoken to you this morning through ancient Scripture that is alive and new each time we come to it.

Jesus the Good Shepherd knows you by name. Every day he is calling to you in love, he has so much care to give to you in the midst of your day-to-day schedules, in the midst of all the voices you wrote down on that yellow piece of paper, and all the other voices that will show up this week.

Every day let us make room and listen.

Listen, Jesus our Good Shepherd is calling, he says: "My sheep hear my voice, I know them and they follow me." May it be so, in your lives and in mine.  
For "The Lord is our shepherd, we have everyting we need." Amen.