

“The Lord is My Shepherd”

“I am Jesus’ little lamb. Ever glad at heart I am, for my shepherd gently guides me, knows my need and well provides me, loves me every day the same, even calls me by my name.” Sound familiar? No, this isn’t memory work that I assigned to you during confirmation class, and it isn’t meant to insult your intelligence as eighth graders. I bring up this hymn and popular children’s song because, first, I suspect many of you learned it at a very young age. Second, its message is a paraphrase of Psalm 23, our sermon text this morning, and third, I believe this message is one that is very appropriate for us to consider on this your confirmation day.

As you are confirmed today, you will be doing the very thing that you did as a young child singing “I am Jesus’ Little Lamb.” You are confessing your faith. The difference is that now you have a few more words in your vocabulary, you have a deeper understanding and ability to express your faith, and now you have reached a level of maturity where by your confession you are invited into communicant membership in your congregation, Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Today we look back on the many blessings God has given you, and we look forward to lives lived under God’s blessing. Today I invite you to confess with me, to confess with the congregation, and to confess with the Psalmist King David, “The Lord is my Shepherd.”

Psalm 23: The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will 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 love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

King David grew up as a shepherd, tending his father’s flocks. In Israel, where David lived, there were many shepherds. So when he wrote about shepherds, almost everyone understood what he was talking about. Today, about 3000 years later, and in a very different country, I wonder how much you or I really know about sheep and shepherds. So what do we mean when we say, “The Lord is my shepherd”?

First of all, we mean that the Lord provides for us. He takes care of everything that we need. David illustrates this idea with the picture of the shepherd leading his sheep to streams of cool water where they can drink, and to green, lush fields where they can eat and rest. God certainly takes care of our physical needs by providing food and clothes and everything that we need to live, but our shepherd does even more than that. David writes, “**He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.**” God’s care and concern for us extend beyond the physical and include everything we need spiritually.

In this way, the picture of a shepherd with his sheep is very useful. Sheep need their shepherd. They can’t find their own way. They can’t get food and water for themselves. And we can’t find spiritual food and water for ourselves either. When we are born into this world, we are enemies of God, set

against him. All we are interested in is our own selfish desires. If you want evidence of this, ask your parents about how difficult you could be from time to time – or perhaps more often than that – as you grew up. Even now, there are times when you aren't nice to each other, or you don't listen to your parents, or even a time or two you didn't pay attention in confirmation class. That's what I mean when I say we can't take care of ourselves spiritually. We sin. We fail. We anger our holy God.

But the Lord is our shepherd. He loves us even though we are sinful sheep. He provided for our spiritual needs by coming to earth to live a perfect life for us and to die in our place. That's exactly what Jesus, our Good Shepherd, explained about himself in our Scripture lesson. And he provides for us spiritually by calling us to faith in that message.

Think of all the ways that God has already taken care of you. He has given you caring parents who shared his Word with you. In baptism he washed away your sins and adopted you into his family. He has surrounded you with a church full of believers to encourage you. Week by week in church and in confirmation class God our shepherd led us to the gentle streams and green pastures of his Word. And week by week you will have similar opportunities for worship and Bible study, and you will be invited to receive the sacrament of Holy Communion. The Lord our shepherd provides for us.

The Lord our Shepherd also protects us. David writes, **“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”** There are very real dangers all around us. “The valley of the shadow of death” is talking about more than being nervous about reading an essay in front of the congregation. It means that throughout our life on earth we are surrounded by enemies, by forces that work against God's will in our lives.

You've no doubt already come across some of these enemies, and you will likely find more and more as you get older. Commercials try to convince us to worry about what makes us happy and the best and newest products that we can have. Non-Christians try to convince us that church is a waste of time and that the Bible is just an old book. Even our own sinful flesh is an enemy as it tries to convince us that we don't really need to read and study God's Word, especially not after we've already been confirmed.

These dangers are real, but so is our Shepherd who protects us from them. He gives us direction in his word and teaches us to escape and to avoid temptation. He reminds us of the cross where he took away our sins so that we don't have to be slaves to them. He gives us his body and blood in the sacrament to strengthen our faith.

And he promises to protect us until we reach our heavenly goal. See, God is not interested only in how this life goes. He wants us to spend eternity with him in heaven. He wants us to **“dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”**

On your confirmation day, you are confessing your faith, and your desire to remain faithful throughout this life and into heaven. The only way this happens is through the care and protection of our Good Shepherd. The members who have gathered here today are also here to support and encourage you. They pray along with me that you will always confess as you do today, “The Lord is my Shepherd.”