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**THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD**  
**Sermon for the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter, 2018**  
**Psalm 23:1a**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Psalm 23:1a: **The LORD is my shepherd.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Everyone has a favourite Bible verse. According to YouVersion, a popular Bible app that has been downloaded onto more than 100 million mobile devices, Romans 8:28 was the most highlighted, shared, and bookmarked verse last year. This verse reads, “*We know that all things work together for good to those whom He has called according to His purpose.*” Another text that was high on the list was John 3:16, “*For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but have eternal life.*” Also high on the list, not surprisingly, was the Twenty-Third Psalm.

The Twenty-Third Psalm is a favourite to many because it brings comfort and peace. This psalm is beloved by many, and over the years many Jews and Christians alike have memorised it, and often we find it used at funeral services either as a spoken Psalm, or in its hymn form. Even lots of people outside God’s church are familiar with this Psalm.

In this Psalm the writer David describes the LORD as his Shepherd. Let me read it to you again, and listen to David in these six short verses as he paints a most beautiful picture of God - a picture that draws us ever closer to this God, who is also our Shepherd:

<sup>1</sup> *The LORD is my shepherd. I shall not lack anything.*

<sup>2</sup> *He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me to water where there is quiet.*

<sup>3</sup> *He restores my soul. He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.*

<sup>4</sup> *Even though I walk through the valley of deep darkness, I shall fear no evil. For You are with me. Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.*

<sup>5</sup> *You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows.*

<sup>6</sup> *Surely, goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.*

Lots can be said about these few verses - we could spend a lot of time learning from them, but today we want to simply look at the first five words: **The LORD is my shepherd.** With these few words, actually only two words in the Hebrew, David, who himself was a shepherd, conveys the image of God as his personal Shepherd. A shepherd is one who cares for you, is concerned about you, and considers your every need. The LORD was this for great King David. He is this for us too! Truly we can join with David and say for ourselves that **The LORD is my shepherd.**

David's pen had scarcely touched the papyrus when he urged us to see this God in a different way than most people do: A God whom you can trust *completely* and in whom you can put all your hopes.

David wants us to have a clear and concrete picture of who the LORD is - He is not a God of our making, but is tangible, touchable, and true. He is comforting, consoling, and committed to you. He is not like the gods of this earth – none of which are truly alive and who cannot hear you. No, the God we have is above all gods. But as powerful and mighty as He is, yet, He is a Shepherd, who touches with His hands of love and mercy the downtrodden, downcast, and disheartened - that is *you.* He is as real as it gets.

In this psalm, David devotes fifty-five words in Hebrew to explaining the first two in English, “**The LORD.**” This LORD is the One who made Himself known to Moses, another shepherd, in the burning bush and in the splitting of the Red Sea as the great I AM.<sup>1</sup> Samuel heard the voice of the LORD as a little lad serving in the temple.<sup>2</sup> David spent time with him while he fought the lion, bear, and Goliath, and as he served and was chased by King Saul.<sup>3</sup> Jeremiah was comforted by Him in a prison cell,<sup>4</sup> and Isaiah saw His glory as the temple shook by His presence.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 3 & 14

<sup>2</sup> 1 Samuel 3

<sup>3</sup> 1 Samuel 17ff

<sup>4</sup> Jeremiah 37

<sup>5</sup> Isaiah 6

David especially knew Him intimately and desired to spend every moment with his Shepherd-God. That is why you hear him say: *“I was glad when people told me, “Let us go to the house of the LORD!””* (Ps. 122:1). That is why he teaches us about his Shepherd-God who brings and offers peace, saying: *“with You there is forgiveness, so that You may be feared,”* (Ps. 130:4). For this reason, David spoke of God’s salvation, stating: *“Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and support me with a willing spirit!”* (Ps. 51:12). David emphatically declares the power of his Shepherd-God, who heals, declaring: *“Cause me to hear joy and gladness! Let the bones that You have crushed rejoice!”* (Ps. 51:8).

**“The LORD is my shepherd,”** David proclaims, and that is our proclamation as well, not just today but every day of our lives. The LORD is the Shepherd who cares for the sheep because they need caring. Sheep are finicky and fussy, and will not lie down if it is uneasy, fearful, or restless. When the shepherd causes the sheep to relax, it will be willing to lie down. The Lord wants us to rest and enjoy His peace, and Jesus tells us of this truth when He says, *“Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,”* (Matt. 11:28). He leads us in green pastures of rich nourishment for our lives and leads us beside waters of serenity and peace. A sheep will not drink if the water is gushing and running and making lots of noise, rather than being quiet and still. So the Lord wants us to be calm and comforted, to experience a deep peace in our soul, in our heart, and in our home.

But sheep are obstinate and dumb. Perhaps out of all God’s creatures they are the least able to take care of themselves. They have no way to defend themselves, with claws to scratch or fangs to bite. They can’t outrun their attackers, and they can’t fend for or clean themselves. They often get themselves in predicaments that they can’t get out of.

Doesn’t that remind you of us - His sheep? How often we try to do it our way or tell God we know better. Many of us, though we would never admit it, like to do things our own way, boastfully declaring our independence.

Yes, we humans want to do things our own way. Forget the easy way. Forget the common way. Forget the best way. Forget God’s way. We want to do things our way, and the Bible is very clear that this is our downfall and demise. Is it any wonder then that we find so much trouble in the world today? Isaiah puts it this way: *“we have all gone astray, like sheep. Each one of us has turned to his own way,”* (53:6). By nature we wander, each one absorbed in his own way. Quite

often people are so absorbed with themselves, their problems, their joys, and their struggles that they have no time to think about anyone or anything else. Our contemporary world seems to want to stay busy doing things so that it doesn't have to stop to think about God, death, and sin. Satan has bewitched so many to remain in a state of denial about the real issues of our relationships with God. Our sinful nature becomes his willing ally. We just don't have time for all this religion stuff, and, if we do, the concept of grace robs us of our self-righteousness, so we reject it. The preaching of the cross is still foolishness and a stumbling block. We remain creatures of the Law, seeking to earn the notice and favour of God by our good thoughts, intentions, and actions, or we continue to live foolishly in our sins, thinking that one day we will repent, but not just now. How often we have wandered from the fold! But the faithful Shepherd comes to the rescue. He comes to bail us out of our own way that leads to death.

That is why David calls him **my Shepherd!** The LORD *is* the faithful Shepherd, who will come to the aid of the one in need. In his own life, David was aware that he needed a lot of help from the LORD, but let's remember one particular occasion. David murdered a man, took his wife, and sinned greatly. David needed healing, forgiveness, and peace, just as you and I do. For we, too, have wilfully and intentionally sinned against God in so many differing ways. Maybe we haven't like David gone so far as to actually murder someone, but we are all guilty of such things as hatred, envy, lust, and jealousy. We could mention so many others, but the point is that in every stage and moment of our life, we need a Good Shepherd who will come to our aid because like obstinate and dumb sheep, often we wander away from the Shepherd and are left totally defenceless against our enemies.

That is why today you need to remember your Shepherd, who from day one has been ready and waiting to come to your aid and rescue. He came to the lost sheep in the Garden of Eden and promised deliverance.<sup>6</sup> He told Moses that he would send a Prophet from among His people<sup>7</sup> who would bring salvation. The Lord Himself would be the Shepherd, who would be faithful and true to His people. Through the prophet Ezekiel, He told His people in captivity - scattered and

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<sup>6</sup> Genesis 3:15

<sup>7</sup> Deuteronomy 18:15

forsaken sheep in the faraway land of Babylon - that He Himself would seek and gather and feed them, and He would send His servant David to shepherd them.<sup>8</sup>

Well, by that time, the days of Ezekiel and the Babylonian captivity, David the shepherd poet had long since gone to heaven. But the LORD was speaking of a new David, the Son of David. God sent His own Son and David's heir, Jesus, to be the eternal Shepherd who would care for all of humanity and deliver them from the power of death and the devil.

In the Gospel of Matthew, we hear this: "*When Jesus saw the crowds, He had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd,*" (Matt. 9:36). As Jesus surveyed that crowd, He had compassion on the people. He saw them as shepherdless sheep who were on their way to hell, and He was determined to rescue as many of them as possible. From our Gospel for today, John chapter 10, we see Jesus teaching the multitude saying, "*I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep,*" (v 11). Ordinarily shepherds protect sheep, but they do not die for their sheep. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is extraordinary because this faithful Good Shepherd did lay down His life for the sheep - you and me - on the splinter of Calvary's wood. He died for the sake of the obstinate and stubborn sheep, by permitting others to nail Him to the cross. He gave His life for you, His sheep, by lying in a cold, dark grave.

Then, three days later He rose from that dark, cold prison of death to give you, His sheep, forgiveness of sins, peace, joy, salvation, and eternal life with Him, our caring Shepherd.

David sure did get it right when he said, "**The LORD is my shepherd.**" And so do we! With David, we too confess and declare the same, "Jesus is my Shepherd!"

I am sure we all have our own favourite Bible verses, but surely, these few words from Psalm 23 must rate close to the top.

May we all remember that Jesus is our Good Shepherd who is always with us, and that one day we shall hear the call of that Great Shepherd when we take our last breath on this earth, when He calls us to be united with Him in the green pastures of heaven. Amen.

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<sup>8</sup> Ezekiel 37

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The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

### PRAYER FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Lord our God, we praise You for Your great goodness; and for the good things that You have prepared for those who love You! Grant that we may obtain those glories, which no human being has ever seen or heard or ever thought could happen, through Jesus Christ, Your holy Servant.

We thank You for sending Christ, the Good Shepherd, into our world, to lay down His life for the sheep, to pay the price of His blood to free us from the power of Satan, from the deserved results of our sins, and from the lifelong fear of death. We praise You also for His triumphant resurrection, and for the glorious promise that all who listen to His voice and follow Him will receive eternal life.

We thank You for His pity and love for us, who were straying and helpless like sheep without a shepherd, but who are now through Your great mercy brought back to fellowship with the true Shepherd and Keeper of our souls. We thank You for Your gracious forgiveness for all our sins, for Your promise of peace, for Your assurance of salvation, for Your presence and power in our lives, and for every gift in Christ Jesus.

Enable us, by Your grace, to follow the example of Jesus, our Saviour and Head, by seeking the lost, lifting up the fallen, strengthening the weary, rescuing the straying, feeding the poor, helping the suffering, sheltering the homeless, and being sensitive to each other's needs. May we thereby proclaim Your praises for calling us out of darkness into Your marvellous light.

Give us the voice and leadership of Jesus the Good Shepherd in all parliaments and councils of the nations, in commerce and industry, in all civic and social life.

Direct our way through the sin, strife, and uncertainty of this age, O Lord. Give us true faith and godly hearts. Strengthen the sick, cheer the depressed, and supply the needy, showing that You are always ready to help in every trouble. Watch over the troubled regions of the Middle East and protect those Christians who are caught up in the ongoing clashes. Bring down all those who wish to rule through tyranny and violence. We ask You to please stop any further escalations that may lead to a full-blown war.

Holy God, gracious Father, You have established the marriage covenant and desire that we keep it holy. We pray for Your blessing upon William Lange and

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Nicala Schutt, who tomorrow will, in Your presence, come together as husband and wife. Help them to prepare for their exchange of vows that with You as their God they may live in marriage to Your honour and their blessing.

Because our eyes have seen Your salvation, when our last hour comes, release Your servants in peace, and receive us into everlasting glory; through Jesus Christ Your Son, our risen Lord and Saviour. Amen.

#### FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER (GOOD SHEPHERD SUNDAY)

Acts 4:1-12

<sup>1</sup> While Peter and John were speaking to the people, the priests, the captain of the Temple and the Sadducees approached them. <sup>2</sup> They were extremely annoyed because Peter and John were teaching the people and preaching in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. <sup>3</sup> They laid their hands on them and put them in custody until the next day. For it was already evening. <sup>4</sup> However, many of those who had heard the Word had become believers, and the number of the men grew to about five thousand. <sup>5</sup> On the next day, their rulers, elders and scribes assembled in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup> Annas the High Priest, Caiaphas, John and Alexander were there and all the other members of the High Priest's family. <sup>7</sup> They made the two men stand in the middle and began to ask, "By what power or by what name have you done this?"

<sup>8</sup> Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, replied to them, "Rulers of the people and elders! <sup>9</sup> If we are being

examined today because of a good deed that we have done to a crippled man, by what means he has been made well, <sup>10</sup> let it be known to you all and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God has raised from the dead, by Him this man is standing here before you in good health! <sup>11</sup> This is 'the Stone that was rejected by you builders, which has become the Cornerstone.' <sup>12</sup> There is also salvation in no one else. For there is no other name under heaven that has been given among human beings by which we must be saved."

1 John 3:16-24

<sup>16</sup> This is how we know love: He has laid down His life for us. We also ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. <sup>17</sup> If anyone has this world's goods and sees his brother in need but shuts his heart against him, how does the love of God remain in him? <sup>18</sup> Little children, let us not only love in words or in talk but in deeds and in truth! <sup>19</sup> This is how we

shall know that we be-long to the truth and how we shall assure our hearts before Him: <sup>20</sup> For whenever our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts and knows everything. <sup>21</sup> Dearly loved people, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God <sup>22</sup> and receive from Him whatever we ask for, because we keep His Commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight. <sup>23</sup> This is also His Commandment, that we should believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ and love one another as He has commanded us. <sup>24</sup> He who keeps His Commandments remains in God, and God remains in him. This is also how we know that He remains in us: by the Spirit, whom He has given to us.

John 10:11-18

<sup>11</sup> "I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup> When the hired man, who is not the shepherd and who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming, he leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf catches them and scatters them. <sup>13</sup> He runs away because he is a hired man and does not care about the sheep. <sup>14</sup> I am the Good Shepherd and I know My own, and My own know Me <sup>15</sup> as

the Father knows Me, and I know the Father and lay down My life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup> I also have other sheep, which are not in this fold. I must also lead them, they will listen to My voice, and there will be one flock and one Shepherd. <sup>17</sup> The reason why the Father loves Me is that I lay down My life, that I may take it back again. <sup>18</sup> No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord. I have authority to lay it down and have authority to take it back again. This command I have received from My Father.