

A Psalm of David.

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;^[a]

³ he restores my soul.^[b]

He leads me in paths of righteousness^[c]

for his name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,^[d]

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^[e] goodness and mercy^[f] shall follow me

all the days of my life;

and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD

for ever.^[g]

May the Lord add his blessing to the reading of His Word.

KAILUA CHRISTIAN CHURCH (UCC)
Sunday, July 10, 2022
10:00 a.m. - Morning Worship
Special Guest Speaker, Pastor Leslie Araki

Morning Message
“Thy Rod and Thy staff They Comfort Me.”

When I lived on the big Island, taking care of my grandmother, I had the joy of going to New Hope Christian Fellowship, where I listened to many wonderful stories. Wayne Cordeiro was one of the best story tellers and mentors I’ve ever met, and this is one of his many wonderful stories.

There was a Christian celebratory gathering in which various members would display their talents to the congregation. Mr. Jones who had a very good Shakespearean voice recited Psalm 23 for the audience in its entirety. It was so good everyone applauded. Then Smitty, an old farmer, was asked to do something for the audience. He initially refused saying that he had no talent and that the only thing he knew how to do was to recite Psalm 23 also but declined to do so because Mr. Jones had done such a great job before him. But he was pressed into doing it by the pastor. He began Psalm 23 and also related how it had comforted him when his wife had died. As he continued with, “He leads me beside quiet waters” he told the story of how a drought almost ruined him, but God saw him through those dark times. Smitty related how he had wanted to give up his farm in desperation, but Psalm 23 made him instead “lie down in green pastures.” He unfolded his long life before the audience and interwove it with the comfort he received from the Psalm. At the end of his recitation not a sound could be heard. Everyone was awed into silence. Finally, Mr. Jones said, “I may know the 23rd Psalm but Smitty here knows the Shepherd.”

One summer, while at Multnomah Seminary, in Portland Oregon, I was blessed to take a class from Ronald Allen on the Book of Psalms. Ron Allen was one of the main editors in the New King James Version. Ron shared with us many of the concepts about Psalm 23 that I will share this morning. Ron made a statement that got my attention and something I have often thought about over the years. He said, “Don’t preach on Psalm 23 until you have been in the ministry for twenty years or more.” His point was that the older we get and the more life experiences we have, the more qualified we are to teach this iconic psalm. I share this psalm with you, not to teach you something or point out something new. I share this psalm this morning so that we can experience it together and draw closer to The Shepherd.

Jesus is called the Good Shepherd because he knows his sheep by name.

David, the same David that defeated Goliath, and later became king of Israel, committed adultery and murder, but was still called a man after God’s own heart. I like to picture David

writing this psalm in a dry and parched land while still a shepherd. He recognized that in the same way that he took care of his sheep, God takes care of him.

Picture him strumming a harp the same way we see local kids and adults strumming the ukulele in a shade as he sung these words:

PSALM 23 A Psalm of David.

***1 The Lord is my shepherd,
I shall not want.***

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures.

Picture in your mind, a desert landscape with small areas of green patches of grass and shrub. That is the landscape of the shepherd and sheep. Now picture yourself in a local park laying on a carpet of green grass. The grass is two inches thick so you can relax in it and look up at the clouds. How peaceful. Just breath. Now picture that grassy area placed in the middle of the dry parched land you pictured. What a blessing for the sheep to have so much grass that they can eat until they like moi moi, crash out, take a nap. That's the abundant blessing that God has given us. More than we need. Think now of some of the abundant blessings God has brought into your life.

He leads me beside still waters.

Now picture in your mind that same desert with the lush Hawaii grass and a nice cool pond in the middle of it. Maybe it has palm trees next to it. It is an oasis in the desert.

Sheep cannot swim. Their wool fills up with water, so they sink and drown. That's why they don't like fast moving water. Now picture an oasis in the middle of that dry desert land with two-inch-thick grass and a pool of water in the middle of it.

- The still water represents the peace of God.
- Ephesians 4:6-7

Now think back to God's provision in your life. See times in your life where he blessed you more than you could have thought or wanted.

***3 He restores my soul. He guides me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.***

- Did you catch that. We are living. Life led by God so we can do righteous acts for God's name's sake.

***4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I fear no evil, for You are with me.***

- Notice the pronoun change from He to You/you're. There is an intimacy with God that we recognize when we are going through the toughest times. "Our Father who art in Heaven..." We are to have a relationship with Papa God. Can we recognize that. We have an intimate relationship with the LORD of Lords and King of Kings, the Almighty God. The LORD is my shepherd.
- **The valley of the shadow of Death or dark valleys. We have experienced many. Not only death but those many difficult times in our lives. Miscarriages, short on money, many things didn't work out because a minute late and a dollar short. Lonely, dark, feeling forsaken times. Fill in the blanks for what it was we missed or lost and what the reasons were. Some of those times when we cry out to God our Father... again.**
- **How do people go through these times without God?**

Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

A Shepherd has two instruments/tools to keep us safe and close to him. The rod was a branch with a knot in it that was tempered with fire. If any predator came close to the flock, the shepherd would place himself between the danger and the sheep.

How many times in our lives has God saved us? Lions and tigers and bears ... oh my. David said to King Saul that when lions and bears attacked his flock he tore them apart with his bare hands.

What has our Shepherd protected you from?

In every flock there are always some Kalohe, rascal, sheep that have a tendency to wander off. Baaa... Baaa. They want to wander away from the shepherd's safety and explore something or somewhere new. Our Father uses the staff to gently pull us back to the flock. Baaa... we head away again...the staff pulls us back again. Then when sheep feels no one is looking it bolts from the flock. That sheep now has a propensity to wander off. We were vulnerable... weak, reckless, lost. Picture in your mind times of folly when we chose to wander...to sin. The lure of sin drew us away. The unknown, the exhilaration of something shiny, but poison to our soul took us away from the Shepherd.

Another thing that Wayne Cordeiro taught me was the definition of Temptation: "Temptation is taking for yourself now, what God wants to bless you even more in the future, if only you had waited."

Ron Allen told us in the Psalms class that what the shepherd will do to a sheep that has a habit to wander off, the shepherd will take that sheep, and break its leg and reset it. He puts medicine on it, wraps it up in some kind of bandage and then... he will pick the sheep up and put it on his shoulder.

That was us. We did that. Whatever that was. God disciplined us and it hurt. Maybe it hurt others, but his strong hands picked us up and put us around his shoulders.

The shepherd then feeds that sheep by hand. He brings it water. He allows the healing to take place. When the shepherd places that sheep on the ground what does it do? It presses into the shepherd and it wants to stay close to him.

That is what God does, did, with us. His forgiveness is complete. I John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies,

This was important in Israel's history because they had big bad enemies. Assyria, Babylon, Persia. What a change of events for the oppressed to be able to eat comfortably in the presence of these enemies.

You have anointed my head with oil.

Oil was a medicine to keep insects out of its nose. Our Shepherd brought us all kinds of physical, emotional, spiritual, and financial healing.

My cup overflows.

Picture the times in your life that God blessed you so much that you were just so joyous. Hallelujah, praise the LORD kind of Joy. Maybe a graduation or promotion. Marriage and children's birth. Seeing one you mentored, and disciples grow in their faith. You fill in the blank.

6 Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life

John 10:10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

John 14: 1-7

Rev. 21:4

Concluding Story adapted from CS Lewis' "The Last Battle."

(The seventh and final book in the Chronicles of Narnia. Walt Disney made three of these books into movies: "The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe, Prince Caspian, and the Voyage of the Dawn Treader.")

The story is an allegory. The setting of the stories is a mystical magical land where some animals could talk. Centaurs, giants, and fawns lived there. A Large Lion named Aslan was the Jesus figure in this allegory.

There was a young prince that was at his father's, the king's, deathbed. His father was aged, diminished, pale, and weak. Then the prince saw his father die. Now he was the king. And he was just like his father. He was brave, kind, just, merciful, and loved by his citizens.

One day, a foreign army that wanted to take over Narnia was persecuting a citizen of the king. It was a talking boar. And it was surrounded by men, mocking it with long spears. The young king was safe under the cover of rocks and branches where he could simply hide but, being the noble brave king that he was he jumped out of his cover and attacked the band of soldiers. The story is called "The Last Battle" because the last king of Narnia dies. In the next scene he is in heaven surrounded by royalty. He is embarrassed because he knows he is covered with the wears of war with blood and mud over him, but when he looks down at his clothes it is spotless. Lifting his arm in the air and bending his knee he notices that some of the chronic aches and pains he had in Narnia are gone. Then he feels two very strong hands on his shoulders, so he turns around. It is his father. No longer looking frail and ill but young, handsome, and strong. Then the two kings hug each other.

C.S. Lewis simply wrote a rendition of what heaven will be like. It pales so much compared to what Paradise, then the new heaven and earth will be like. Some of our loved ones and friends are already there. They are with Jesus. They will be there to welcome us with a crowd of witnesses when we enter glory.

Psalm 23 is a passage to be memorized and experienced. All the nuances and information that we pick up over the years to come will be delicious but that is not what we want and long for. We long for the Shepherd. We want to know the Shepherd. We want to know Jesus and experience more of this psalm as we live this side of the New Narnia, the new heaven and earth.

John 14:1-7

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

Jesus the Way to the Father

14 “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe^[a] in God; believe also in me. ²In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?^[b] ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. ⁴And you know the way to the place where I am going.”^[c] ⁵Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” ⁶Jesus said to him, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷If you know me, you will know^[d] my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

Revelation 21:4

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

⁴ he will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Death will be no more;

mourning and crying and pain will be no more,

for^[a] the first things have passed away.”