

Home Service for April 26, 2026

Welcome and Announcements

You may also find listening to some of your favorite hymns helpful in worship.

Listen, our shepherd is calling us by name.

Call to Worship:

The Lord is our shepherd. We are Christ's sheep.

The shepherd shelters us in green pastures. In Christ, we dwell secure.

The shepherd nourishes us and restores our souls. Christ is our shepherd and gate to the Most High.

Opening Prayer:

Loving Shepherd, you call us as your own. When danger is close at hand, you gather us to yourself, that we might dwell secure. When evil surrounds us, you give us a home and a safe place to rest. When foes threaten our fellowship, you rescue us from peril. Restore our souls, Gentle Savior, and lead us in the paths of righteousness, that we may walk in the ways of goodness and mercy, all the days of our lives. Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

Loving Shepherd, even when we stray, we long to be gathered to your side. Even when we strive to find our own way, we yearn to return to your fold and rest secure in your gentle arms. Even when we bleat our resistance, we seek your guidance and direction in our lives. Be our gate, our way to safe havens, where we can always find our way home and dwell secure in your love. Amen.

Words of Assurance:

The Good Shepherd anoints our heads with oil, nourishes us with living waters, delivers us from evil, and watches over us day and night. Because of our Shepherd, we shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Read Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,

³ he refreshes my soul.

He guides me along the right paths
for his name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk

through the darkest valley,^[a]
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

⁶ Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord
forever.

Prayers of the People:

Help us to move beyond the “sampler” prayer so often found printed on pillows, on wall hangings: “The Lord is my Shepherd.” Help us to understand what those words truly mean, O Lord. We can count on you. You are the one who holds our lives, guides our steps, comforts and sustains us. You want for us the lush greenness of verdant pastures and the alluring draw of still waters; yet you know that our lives will not be smooth; there will be rough times. We can count on you, Lord. We can place our trust in you. Help us to feel the power of the Psalmist’s words: “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.” Nothing can trouble, nothing can threaten. You are with us. As we reach out in love and service to others, remind us that the work we do in your name, with love and compassion, is an echo of your tender mercy and loving care. Strengthen us and give us enthusiasm to follow the Shepherd all the days of our lives. AMEN.

Lord’s Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is The kingdom, and the power and the glory forever and ever. AMEN

Read the Lesson: Acts 2:42-47

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and

sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Read the Epistle Lesson: 1 Peter 2:19-25

For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. ²⁰ But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. ²¹ To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

²² “He committed no sin,
and no deceit was found in his mouth.”^[a]

²³ When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴ “He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.” ²⁵ For “you were like sheep going astray,”^[b] but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Read the Gospel Lesson: John 10:1-10

“Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. ² The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” ⁶ Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

⁷ Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. ⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.^[a] They will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

Message

Today’s sermon is a combination of Palm 23 and today’s Gospel. The Bible provides us with images of God that have concrete meaning for us and that apply to God as he appears to us and reveals himself to us, and as we relate to him. For example, God is described as creator, as king, as judge, and as father. The image used also defines where we stand in relation to God: as part of creation, as subject, as defendant, and the one I like the most, as child. Different images may

appeal to us in different times of our lives and in different situations. That is what we see people doing even in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

King David used many images to describe his understanding of God and his relationship with him. In many of his Psalms he started statements with, “The Lord is my ...” Here are some examples:

The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer.

The Lord is my light and my salvation.

The Lord is my strength and my shield.

And in Psalm 23: The Lord is my Shepherd.

Where did these statements come from? First, we must remember that he had been taught from early childhood about who God is and what God had done. Even though there was a shortage of Holy Scripture in writing, the great narrative of God and his people Israel was taught in homes, in public meetings, in the evenings around the camp fire, and during the great festivals. His father told David and his siblings how God called Abraham and promised to make him a great nation. They were told about Moses, who led Israel out of Egypt, out of slavery, to wander in the wilderness for forty years and then, under the leadership of Joshua, to conquer the Promised Land. They told about the times of the judges, when God gave his people over to their enemies when they had disobeyed him, but delivered them again when they turned back to their God. That teaching made up the framework for what David knew about God.

Secondly, David had several personal experiences with God. As a young teenager, he had taken care of the sheep of his father’s flock. He had been a good shepherd to them, leading them to places where they were safe and had plenty to eat and drink. At night, he had looked at the starry sky in amazement, and even composed songs like Psalm 8:

Lord, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
what is mankind that you are mindful of them,
human beings that you care for them?

David had mountain-top experiences with God. One of them was the moment when he was chosen and anointed to become king of Israel. Sometime later, God empowered him to fight and kill the giant Philistine warrior Goliath. And years later, David rose to the throne to become one of the mightiest rulers in the Middle-East.

But he also had his share of deep-and-dark valley experiences. For years he was haunted and pursued by king Saul, who was determined to kill David. Once he became king, David had to

fight enemies around him and enemies from within his kingdom, and even from within his family. All these experiences shaped how David felt about God, and how he saw God.

Thirdly, there were hopes and expectations. There were God's promises to Abraham to make Israel into a great nation that would be a blessing to the whole world. And there were many personal promises that David had received from God. And not the least, God had promised that his throne would be established forever and that one of his descendants would sit on it and rule Israel as a mighty and independent nation.

In Psalm 23, this teaching, these experiences, and these hopes and expectations boil down to two distinct images. First, in the verses 1–4, he describes God as a Shepherd. And then in verse 5, the image changes into that of God as a Host.

Perhaps these two images describe two different stages in the life of David: the time before and the time during his reign as king of Israel. Or maybe David thought of life on earth and life after death. That is how we often read and understand this Psalm today. That is why it is used so often in funerals. Because it contrasts the plight of this life with the blessing of heaven.

It does not really matter which we support. The point is that David used these two images to describe the reality of life with God. They speak about his relationship with God. They are not so much the answer to the question: "What or who is God?" They do not define him. Rather they define the relationship between God and David.

There are three points in this Psalm, that I would like to bring to your attention. The first comes right in the opening line: "The LORD is my Shepherd." And what does this say about his relationship to this God of Israel? "He is my Shepherd." Many times in the Old Testament, God is described as the Shepherd of his people Israel. They are his flock, but David does not say: "The Lord is our Shepherd" but he said, "my Shepherd". He takes God very personally. David wants to emphasize that he is not just one of the flock. He has a personal one-to-one relationship with God.

In today's Gospel, Jesus, the Son of God, calls himself the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd knows each and every sheep of his flock by name. He knows his sheep personally, and the sheep know his voice and listen when their name is called out. That was a reality in sheep farming in those days, and it is still a reality in many parts of the world.

Jesus wants us to recognize him both as our Shepherd and each of us as our personal Shepherd. We should not become so individualistic in our faith as to ignore the rest of the flock. As Christians we are called into a community of believers, into the family of God, into the kingdom of heaven. We belong together. But that does not give us an excuse to hide anonymously in the flock, or to delegate our Christian faith and calling to the church as a community or institution. Jesus wants to have a personal relationship with each and every one of us. For each and every one of us counts. Jesus is your Shepherd and he is my Shepherd. We are not his only sheep, but he is our only Shepherd.

The second point in this psalm is that life is a journey. Psalm 23 is a psalm of comfort and assurance. The verbs used in the verses 1–4 do not express a matter-of-fact statement of what life is like every day. Rather, they express purpose or assurance. They look into the future and see where the Lord is leading. The King James version states: “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.” That understanding turns the picture into a very realistic one.

Remember in Israel the dry season can be long and hot. Much of the countryside can be dried out completely. Shepherds had to lead their flocks over long distances through rough places to bring them to plains with fresh water and green grass. There were dangerous stretches on the way, and shepherds had to be careful in choosing the right path. There were dark valleys that provided relatively safe passage through dangerous mountain ridges. But for sheep to be ready to enter the darkness, the shepherd has to go in front. They would trust the route only, if the shepherd whose voice they knew was going ahead of them.

Often, life reminds us more of dried out plains with virtually nothing to eat than of green pastures and refreshing streams of water. Often, we feel as if we live in deep darkness rather than bright daylight. Faith in God does not make life any easier. Following the Good Shepherd does not solve our problems once and for all. But what we do know is that when we follow Christ, we are going on the right path. We are moving in the right direction. Our future will be one of abundance and peace. God’s goodness and love will pursue us as we pursue the kingdom of God and his righteousness. It is worth the troublesome journey, because we trust God for bringing us to that perfect destination, where we will be guests of God.

And that brings us to our third point. Looking at the psalm as Hebrew poetry, we realize that the climax is not, as we often think, in the closing verses, even though they promise us a happy ending. The climax is right in the middle. The center phrase, the message which David wants to leave us with, is in verse 4: “You are with me.” It is great to know that we are on a journey towards a bright and glorious future, where there will be no tears, or pain, or grief, or lack of the essentials. But already now, as we journey over dry and miserable plains and through deep and dark valleys, God is with us. As long as we follow the Shepherd, we are not alone.

If we do not follow God’s guidance in our lives, if we don’t listen to his voice and stay close to him, we may well find ourselves separated from him, and wandering in the wilderness of life without knowing where to go; we will be like lost sheep. Only if we follow, and if we listen to His voice, we can be assured of His presence with us. And when He is with us, we are safe whatever the circumstances.

We know that David was not much of a saint. He did many things that caused God great distress. But God loved him. David was a man after God’s heart, so the Bible says. And that is why God never left him. We may not be saints either. There are many things in our lives, too, that make God sad. We should repent of those and seek God’s forgiveness and reconciliation. God gave Israel the promise: “Return to me, and I will return to you.” That same promise and that same call to repentance God addresses to us through Jesus, the Good Shepherd. If we

answer that call and claim that promise, we can have that same assurance that David had: God is with us. Amen.

Benediction:

Beloved, may God bless you with open hearts and minds so that together we may pay attention, discern, and follow your Shepherd's voice, for that is the way that leads to abundant life on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.