Acts 4:5-12 "By what power have you healed?" (Psalm 23)

1 John 3:16-24 "lay our lives down" (John 10:11-18) good Shepherd Sermon: The Good Shepherd

Jesus says in John 10, “I am the Good Shepherd, because no matter what happens, I am there for you.” In Luke, there is the parable of the lost sheep in which the shepherd leaves the 99 to go after the one stray sheep and carries it on his shoulders, rejoicing. That image is one of the most common in the catacombs when the church was suffering cruelly; the Good Shepherd was a comfort. The Good Shepherd image as a spiritual leader is endorsed in the stories of the Patriarchs, the prophets, and the Psalms. The key passage concerning shepherds is Psalm 23. It is so beautiful, artistic, and poetic that I am going to take a close look at each verse this morning. It begins, “The Lord is my Shepherd; I lack nothing.” A truer translation is, “I will not diminish, decrease, or fade away. Who I am will never be taken from me.”

David, in his early days, had this experience. When the Prophet came to David’s father’s house looking for a new King, Jesse his father showed off all the tall, handsome, imposing brothers. But he did not bring the smaller, younger, differently complected David. Samuel had to ask, “Did you forget someone?” But David was never diminished, disrespected, or abandoned by God. David writes that God “makes me to lie down in green pastures.” To lie down means to really relax.

The hardest thing for an American to do is to relax, to lie down, look up at the sky, and let the cloud formations entertain you. Yet, those are some of the most memorable moments in our lives.

Here's the revised text with spelling, punctuation, and grammar errors fixed:

Next, he continuously leads me with intense and careful care beside still waters. When our oldest grandchild was young and we took her on a walk, she wandered. Ironically, she never knew that we were shepherding her. That intense, constant, and careful care is the hallmark of this entire Psalm.

We are guided beside quiet waters. Water for us and for the Hebrews is life-giving. Here, the rest on the pastures and the gentle walk by the stream revive and refresh us at our deepest level.

The prayerful pilgrimage with the Good Shepherd keeps us in “ruts of righteousness” as we pick up repeated habits, and they become easy to follow. Like the paths that John the Baptist encouraged his fellow countrymen and women to keep straight. Righteousness at root is a word for true weights and measures, things that are right and solid, which for Hebrews would include keeping your promises to others. This righteousness is for God’s name's sake; it is his reputation. Many times, in David’s prayers, he says, “God, I always brag on you, how will it look if you fail me? It is your honor I am looking out for.” The themes of David being disrespected and being careful of God’s honor both come out in the David and Goliath Story. David was bringing lunch to the troops. David’s oldest brother was furious with him, saying, "You only came to watch, get lost, you ‘wannabe’!" David saw Goliath, and when everyone ran from him, David decided to handle it. His family and his fellow countrymen said, “You are too young, too small, and too inexperienced to fight this Philistine.” David replied, “When our sheep were attacked by a lion who dragged one off, I killed the lion and brought the sheep back.” He then answered Goliath’s trash talk by saying, “You use weapons, I came in the name of God…” Indeed, for Here's the revised text with spelling, punctuation, and grammar errors fixed:

His name's sake. David then got Israel out of a very tight and dangerous place, like the one described in verse 4. “Though I should walk through the dark, foggy, gloomy, dangerous, and steep ravine, I will fear no evil.” The Hebrew concept of a trial was being confined to tight places. They were nomads who liked the wide-open spaces. They did not like to be cornered.

There is a similar sense in the next verse, “You are constantly and continually preparing a table for me in the presence of my enemies.” Enemies come from the root of scant, to tie up, or bind. Enemies reduce your choices in life; they put you in tight corners. If the poor have fewer options because of some policy or person, that person is an enemy of the poor. The idea of continuously preparing a table appears in the Lord’s prayer petition, “Give us our daily bread.” It also echoes the Manna in the wilderness story. Israel was led through dark and barren land and had enemies all around, yet God provided them with Manna. It says, “You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.” Psalm 104 says oil makes for a strong heart and wine makes us happy. Life is to be enjoyed. The poetry concludes with, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in God’s house forever."

And we are in God’s house. I can tell you that because our Deacons are shepherds, real shepherds, who with careful care consider each of us. Let’s celebrate this at our Deacon’s Parish Lunch today following worship.