

The LORD Is My Shepherd

In the Name of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, dear fellow sheep of His flock:

Last evening I listened to a voicemail from a pastor friend in Woodville, WI. Our project was not directly related to this memorial service, but he wished me the Lord's blessing on my preparation and then closed with this: "Remind them of God's great love for us." Afterwards I couldn't help thinking how blessed I am to have friends who think that way, brothers in the faith who are also convinced of God's goodness in Christ Jesus, men who use all their resources during this time of grace on earth to remind everyone of God's great love for us. Such a man was my friend and brother Chris Huber.

One thing I would have liked was for our Sunday School children to sing. But with our Lutheran school across town logistics would be nearly impossible. Then it dawned on me that our former principal and faithful school administrator would prefer not to take them out of class. Besides, Chris is now doing what he loved so much while with us here below. He's immersed in the perfect harmony of heaven with the holy angels and God's holy saints, all those trusted in Jesus and went home to glory ahead of us.

That's where our loving Savior-God is directing our thoughts through our tears today. Onward and upward to glory with God is always the direction His Son Jesus, is leading us. I didn't realize this about the favorite Shepherd-Psalm 23, until I read the classic devotional by Philip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks At Psalm 23*.¹ These six treasured verses trace the route of a shepherd with his sheep from the ranch house on the plain below to the high mountain meadows of endless summer. With the dear Holy Spirit's blessing, let's follow again with the sheep joyfully exclaiming: **The LORD Is My Shepherd.**

God's people originally heard these words in Hebrew: **יְהוָה רֹעִי לֹא אֶחְסָר**. In a more recent translation, Chris with his background would hold it in his heart language like my Granddad whom Chris just met among the angelic choirs. Luther's German goes: *Der HERR ist mein Hirte; mir wird nichts mangeln*. I only share this to point out that God's people through ages have treasured this Psalm to carry in their hearts among the most memorized words of God's Holy Book, the Bible. I'm still amazed how comforted people are even though few of us have ever tended sheep. **The LORD Is My Shepherd.**

"I shall not want." There is something so serene, so comforting and peaceful when God the Holy Spirit has brought you into a personal relationship with God through His Son Jesus Christ. The LORD supplies everything we need for body and soul because He is first our Creator who loves us, secondly our Redeemer who laid down His life for us, His sheep, and thirdly our Sanctifier who day by day pours out His love in sweat equity for the sheep of His pasture. The Triune God loves us into a joyful contentment that shows. Chris Huber always reminded me of God's love by His peaceful deportment.

"He makes me lie down in green pastures." Sheep generally thrive in arid, rocky places where there are fewer diseases for their susceptible bodies, but where green pastures don't grow by themselves. It takes great effort for a faithful shepherd to clear the rocks, pull the noxious weeds, plow and seed for rich green grass to grow. But later in life after our loving Lord had again lead Chris to such **"green pastures"** of His Word and sacrament, all of us witnessed his grand and glorious gratitude. Chris used His teaching skills to lead the Sunday School children into Jesus' **green pastures**. He loved the children and seemed to enjoy so much just teaching them the wonder of this: **The LORD Is My Shepherd.**

"He leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul." When it comes to our souls, many people think it doesn't matter where you get the water. But parents don't want their kids drinking from

¹ Available from Northwestern Publishing House – 1-800-662-6022.

each other's cups, much less taking in polluted water. Our Good Shepherd knows how prone we sheep are to stop along the way and drink from mud puddles, as if that's the best water available. We think we're okay because it takes a while for the parasites, flukes and nematodes to spoil our soul. But when stressful days come, our Good Shepherd wants us healthy and strong. He leads to crystal clear mountain streams along the way. He knows there is no cleaner water than the heavy dew in His rich green pastures. There we can graze on His Word, then lie down in the shade of His loving kindness and tender mercy – souls at rest, restored for another day. As Saint Augustine of Africa summed up so well: "O God! Thou has made us for Thyself and our souls are restless, searching, 'til they find their rest in Thee."

"He guides me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake." The LORD's Name is His reputation. He explained it to Moses on Mount Sinai: ***"The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation"... "of those who hate me."*** (Exodus 34:6f; 20:5 NIV84) Nothing pleases the LORD, the God of the Bible, more than to give His righteousness and holiness freely to all who come to Him with humble, penitent hearts. Kneel before Him. Call on His Name. You will find God is like a loving father longing for you to come home to His good graces, eager to wrap His arms around you in kindness and tenderness. To ***"a thousand generations"*** He loves to bless. But where some teach their children to sin and rebel against God, He gives them the punishment we all deserve. It can only be removed by the ***"blood of Jesus Christ,"*** our Good Shepherd. His holy, precious blood ***"cleanses us from all sin."*** (1 John 1:7)

For the sake of our Savior's Name-reputation, Chris used his stature to speak up and help guide this congregation in God's ways. His voice turned the tide when we desperately needed office staff. This helped bring my personal and family life into better balance and enabled me to spend more time seeking lost and straying sheep in the Name of our Good Shepherd. Not until the other day when someone from St. Croix Lutheran High School called did I find out something else. Chris was instrumental in helping start their Middle School. Chris never told me. He was always focused on glorifying God's good Name.

"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." In these past months Chris was too busy thanking and praising the LORD to complain about the valley through which Jesus was leading. ***"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows."*** Quiet contentment continues wherever the dear Holy Spirit, the ***"oil"*** of God's grace, continues to flood the soul with His loving kindness and tender mercy. I didn't get to visit much; Chris kept coming to church.

"Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life...." The ancients called sheep the "golden hoofs" because they could turn blasted, broken pastures into rich green meadows by what they left behind. They will even eat Canadian thistle before it can take over a pasture. Too earthy for some, but sheep walk to the top of the hills and deposit their fertilizer where the wind blows bare and raw.

What kind of blessing did Chris leave behind? My wife Cindy gave me Chris' last of many Easter cards written twenty-one days before he went home to Jesus. "May the words of our lips fill our hearts and lives as we greet one another this Easter Day. 'Good morning! Christ is risen!' And may the white-robed and joyous guests of God answer from the heavenly places above. 'He is risen indeed!'" Chris saved this "from the Easter Sunday service program of my hometown church, Zion Lutheran, Eureka, SD, March 28, 1948. He was sixteen. Now he is forever young, dwelling ***"in the house of the LORD forever."***

We'll let Chris' words close this sermon: "May its message be as meaningful to you as it has been to me all these 68 years. I wish you a glorious Easter and conclude with the wonderful refrain, 'Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!'"

For all who learn to say, **The LORD Is My Shepherd**, during this time of grace, we will see Chris again in glory. And best of all, we will see our Savior face to face. Amen.

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