

Pastor Mark A. Cordes
June 11, 2017 – TRINITY SUNDAY

Psalm 23:1b
CW 574

“I Shall Not Want”

☞ **All that I need – supplied**

☞ **I am content**

In the name of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, dear sheep:

Shepherd Phillip Keller knew that the welfare of any flock depends entirely on the management of the owner. The tenant sheep man on the next farm left his land neglected – no time for the flock. His sheep scavenged under attack by dogs, cougars and rustlers. They gnawed their way across barren brown fields, completely unprotected against storms and blizzards. Polluted, muddy water, lack of salt and trace minerals, left them sickly thin, weak, diseased, staring wistfully through the wires at the rich green pastures on Keller’s side. Their callous, indifferent shepherd knew their needs. He simply did not care.

Does this not remind you of “those wretched old taskmasters, Sin and Satan, on their derelict ranch” (p.29)? Their sheep might be the wealthiest folks on the planet, brilliant scientists like Keller knew, but their souls are shriveled in the iron grip and heartless ownership of the wrong master.

So how blessed are we to be sheep in the care of Jesus, the Good Shepherd? Does “**I Shall Not Want**” always mean green pastures, easy pickings for His flock? Peace and contentment always radiating from our lives? Do Christ’s caring hands lead us only from one high adventure to another? Do we somehow land in the Theology of Glory without the cross? How do we understand, “**I Shall Not Want**”?

☞ **All that I need – supplied**

First of all, think of King David, the inspired author of Psalm 23. Remember how David had to flee from jealous King Saul in the deserts of Judea? Later David ran from his own son Absalom without food and water. What about Elijah in the three-year drought? Was he not in want?

Even before that when the LORD led His flock of Israelites out of Egypt by Moses in the desert, talk about scary, wilderness want! Moses recalled to Israel how the LORD “***humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.***” (Deuteronomy 8:3 NIV84) When they followed God’s commands, everyone had enough. But if they tried to gather too much manna, it spoiled and stank – except on Friday. Twice as much was okay to prepare for rest in God’s Word on the Sabbath. Those who went out looking for manna on Saturday, found none.

Martin Luther had an interesting perspective on this: “When Moses says that a person can’t live on bread alone, he isn’t only talking about manna. These words apply both to times when you’re hungry and to times when you have plenty of food. The point is that God wants to show you his goodness through all your experiences. When you’re hungry, you should learn to trust God’s Word. God promises to take care of you and not let you die of hunger. When you trust in him, he will provide nourishment to your body because of your faith. He does all this to prevent you from worshipping your appetites and to teach you that life doesn’t depend on a full stomach. God sustains both the body and the soul. You would’ve never learned this truth if your stomach had always been full. This is how you learn to trust in God.”²

¹ Keller, Philip. *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*. Zondervan Publ. House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1970. Available from NPH, 1-800-662-6022. Also at Amazon / Audible Books. First in Summer Sermon Series by Pastor Mark A. Cordes.

² Dr. Martin Luther, *By Faith Alone*. Devotion on Deuteronomy 8:3, for 6/5. PocketBible by Laridian – www.laridian.com.

So the LORD provided David with friends to bring him food and water when he fled. Elijah followed the LORD's command to the Kerith Ravine where the ravens brought him food. When the brook dried up, the LORD led him to a Gentile widow at Zarephath. The Triune God enabled her to obey His Word and feed Elijah first. As promised, her jar of flour and jug of oil never ran out. She and her son ate with the LORD's prophet until the famine was over. Countless Christians have loaned money to the LORD by caring for the poor, only to be repaid many times over by the Good Shepherd. He laid down His life for His sheep. He constantly works to keep pastures green and even supplies food by miracles if needed.

Too often we are like a stubborn sheep struggling up a steep mountainside, desperately stretching for that last clump of windblown grass on top. The Good Shepherd watches a while. Finally He comes after us, picks us up and turns us around. Sometimes He just needs to take away our little lumps of grass. "See the rich green pasture I've prepared in my Word and Sacraments? Stop straining for things in this life that cannot satisfy! Come back to the flock. I'll feed you with more than enough for body and soul. In my pastures all your **needs** are **supplied**." So are we all together? Can you honestly say...?

👁 I am content

To be painfully honest, contentment comes and goes. Kids look forward to getting out of school. Summer comes, now you're bored. Many a Mom has told her kids, "You find something to do or I'll find something for you." How about Dad assigning twenty minutes a day weeding the garden or flower beds? Kids content? Finally, you get your dream house, but the roof leaks. Windows need replacing. Weeds grow in your new lawn! Still content? At last – a new car. First drive...fender bender! Still content? If kids and cars and the "American dream" were all we had, who could really say, "**I am content**"?

The Good Shepherd knows His sheep, just what we need to hear. The old sinful nature inside us all can never be content. It always covets the blasted brown pastures on Satan's old derelict ranch. Sin just looks so fine from a comfortable spot in our Savior's field. He'd post warning signs, but sheep can't read. Sometimes we're deaf too. So lessons need to be taught by example.

Phillip Keller fondly remembered one of his most attractive sheep – beautifully proportioned, strong constitution, excellent wool, alert, bright-eyed, bore sturdy, fast-growing lambs. But she was always restless. No matter how green his pasture, she was always looking for a loophole in the fence. Often Keller would find her feeding on bare, brown, burned-up pasture on the other side where she'd forced herself through. He called his discontented fence crawler, "Mrs. Gad-about." No matter what, she never learned her lesson. Instead she taught her lambs her escape tactics. Soon the rest of the flock following her into want and danger. After putting up with her all summer, Shepherd Keller had to make a difficult decision. He loved her as much as all the rest, but he could not allow one obstinate, discontented ewe to ruin the entire flock. He had to end her fence-crawling career. In spite of the very best care, in spite of all his love, she would not be content. At last he took his knife and butchered her.

Warnings and kind hearted promises. The Lord's Apostle Paul wrote: "***I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.***" (Philippians 4:12f NIV84) It helps to know that even Saint Paul had to learn contentment in God's care. Jesus told the rich young man: "***Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.***" (Mark 10:21 NIV84) Get rid of everything that comes between you and your Good Shepherd. "***Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.***" (Psalm 37:4 NIV84). We learn contentment through times of trouble when we see again how skilled and generous our Good Shepherd really is. He constantly and completely forgives every moment of discontent. Father, Son and Holy Spirit eagerly provide our physical, emotional, spiritual needs. The LORD is my Shepherd. As long as I'm with Him, I lack nothing. Amen.