

Sermon / 30 April 2023/ John 10:1-10/ Pasture / The Rev. David Martin, Deacon / St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Albuquerque, NM

Jesus takes us to lie down in green pastures.
Jesus leads us beside still waters.
Jesus restores our souls.

The 23rd Psalm. Isn't that beautiful? It sounds idyllic.
Green pastures and still waters.... a place to be restored.

This has been a difficult week for me. And I know it's been a difficult week for several members of our St. Mark's community as well. I've talked with some of you about your troubles, written prayers for our intercessory prayer group, and walked with a few of you on unfamiliar and difficult journeys.

I could really use those green pasture and still waters right now. You could, too. Right? How do we find them – that pasture and those waters? And once we get there – what happens? How are we restored?

Today we prayed the 23rd Psalm and heard that the Lord is our Shepherd. The Gospel from John also talks about Jesus - our Shepherd - taking care of us – his flock.

God wants to take care of us. In our darkest hour, through our deepest sorrow, in the midst of our greatest mistakes – God is with us.

In the confusion and chaos of our lives -
Jesus takes us to lie down in green pastures.
Jesus leads us beside still waters.
Jesus restores our souls.

This concept is not limited to Psalm #23. Throughout scripture we hear about God wanting to take care of us – to help us.

Psalm 18 tells us that “The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer. My God is my rock in whom I take refuge, my shield and my salvation.”

The writer of Psalm 55 shares: “Give your burdens to God and God will take care of you.”

Similarly in the first letter of Peter, we read, “Take all your anxiety to God because God cares about you.”

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells his friends, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. For I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

And the 23rd Psalm assures us:
Jesus takes us to lie down in green pastures.
Jesus leads us beside still waters.
Jesus restores our souls.

These are all beautiful and comforting words. But where is that green pasture?
Where are those still waters?
Where do you mentally, emotionally, physically go when you are troubled? Where is that pasture?
When you are depressed, or lonely. Where is that pasture of peace?
When you think you can't take another step. Where is that pasture where your soul will be restored?
Where is the Good Shepherd when you need them? So desperately need them?

That green pasture – those still waters – are all located in different places for each of us. It's a place where we feel safe. It's a place where we know we are accepted and loved for who we are the moment we arrive. It's a place of peace and comfort.

Perhaps St. Mark's is your pasture. Maybe it's this room – or the Fish Garden – or the courtyard off the Parish Hall. Your pasture might be a library. Maybe your pasture is somewhere a little busier – a café or coffee shop where you can concentrate but not feel alone. Perhaps your pasture is a hike in the mountains or maybe even an actual...pasture.

Your pasture might not be a physical space. Perhaps meditation or contemplative prayer takes you to your pasture. Maybe it a good massage to release stress. Or anywhere in your favorite comfortable sweats.

I'll share a secret with you. My pasture is on the couch watching daytime soap operas. It takes me back to my childhood and watching those shows with my mother. I feel innocent – safe and protected. And I definitely binge-watched *The Young and the Restless* this week.

Your pasture can be anywhere that feels right for you.

And once we get to our pasture, how will we find our Good Shepherd? We heard that the Lord is our Shepherd. Jesus tells us that he is the Good Shepherd.

And where do we find Jesus? We've talked about this so many times, right? We find Jesus embodied in the people around us. We find Jesus in the people we love – our family and friends – our faith community. We are here for each other.

You do not have to bear any burden alone. Got that? There is no shame in having trouble. There is no guilt in asking for help. There is not a single thing wrong with going through difficult times. Everyone make less than perfect choices. We all encounter rough patches in our lives. We all need help and can find it in the green pastures and still waters of our faith community – our family and our friends.

God is here among us. That is one of the main reasons we gather – to be that Good Shepherd for each other. We are called to be the embodiment of Jesus to the world. We are called to be the Good Shepherd for each other in times of need. And we can't all be shepherds all the time. Shepherds need sheep. Sometimes you are a sheep. And then in the future, you'll be called upon to be the shepherd.

Find your pasture. Find your shepherd. And utilize the restorative power that Jesus talks about.

While studying for this sermon, I discovered a beautiful poem. It is written by a Canadian church worker. His name is Andrew King and he has a web site called "A Poetic Kind of Place: Andrew King's Lectionary Blog." The poem is entitled "Pasture." I invite you to maybe close your eyes and listen closely.

Pasture

There is a place we can find, a good place
like quiet meadows where flowers spread,
like green grasses by gentle streams;
a place where the heart feels nourished,
where the mind is hopeful, unhurried,
where the spirit is glad and at peace.

We'll name this place fulfillment,
we'll name it healing and thankfulness,
we'll name this good place *pasture*
for there we seek to feed.

And there is a voice we can hear that calls us,
a gentle voice, melodious,
a voice like songbirds and laughter,
like a parent (*mother*) comforting their (*her*) children,
like a shepherd calling their (*his*) sheep.

We'll name this voice acceptance,
we'll name it mercy and forgiveness,
we'll name it the voice of God's love,
inviting us gently to feed.

It invites us to enter pasture when we think we're too hurting to listen,
too angry or grieving or fearful to hear the voice that calls us to peace.

It invites us to enter pasture when we're sure we're too busy to listen,
too burdened or worried or pressured to hear the voice that calls us to peace.

It says: Come in and go out and find pasture.
It says: We are safe with the shepherd of all sheep.
It says: Meadows await us, in this moment.
It says: Rest in love. Where you are. Joyfully feed.

At the end of today's Gospel, Jesus tells us that that he came to earth so that we
might have life – and have it abundantly.

Let it be our prayer that each of us will find comfort and peace with our Good
Shepherd when we need it so that we may enjoy that abundant life.

Let it be our prayer that each of us will have the honor of **being** a Good Shepherd
when we are needed so that we may share that abundant life.

Let it be our prayer that each of us finds our perfect, green, peaceful pasture.