

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON

Third Sunday of Easter

May 8, 2022

Psalm 23:1–6 (ESV):

1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters.

3 He restores my soul.

He leads me in paths of righteousness

for his name's sake.

4 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.

5 You prepare a table before me

in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil;

my cup overflows.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me

all the days of my life,

and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD

forever.

1st Scripture Reading: Acts 20:17–35 (ESV):

Paul Speaks to the Ephesian Elders

17 Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to

him. 18 And when they came to him, he said to them:

“You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, 19 serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; 20 how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, 21 testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. 22 And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, 23 except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. 24 But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. 25 And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. 26 Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, 27 for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. 28 Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. 29 I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. 32 And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. 33 I coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel. 34 You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. 35 In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’ ”

EPISTLE: Revelation 7:9–17 (ESV):

9 After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, 10 and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” 11 And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God,

12 saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

13 Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" 14 I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

15 "Therefore they are before the throne of God,
and serve him day and night in his temple;
and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.

16 They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore;
the sun shall not strike them,
nor any scorching heat.

17 For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd,
and he will guide them to springs of living water,
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Gospel: John 21:1-19 (ESV):

I and the Father Are One

22 At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, **23** and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon. **24** So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." **25** Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, **26** but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. **27** My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. **28** I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. **29** My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. **30** I and the Father are one."

I and the Father Are One

15 When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He

said to him, **“Feed my lambs.”** **16** He said to him a second time, **“Simon, son of John, do you love me?”** He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, **“Tend my sheep.”** **17** He said to him the third time, **“Simon, son of John, do you love me?”** Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, **“Do you love me?”** and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, **“Feed my sheep.** **18** Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.” **19** (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, **“Follow me.”**

Sermon 11 – Fourth Sunday of Easter

“Will of the Last”

Acts 20:17-35

Dear friends,

Paul here is about to go to Jerusalem, and he knows what going to Jerusalem means. Paul going to Jerusalem is like a mouse going to an owl's nest, a sheep hanging out around lions. The Jewish religious leadership has been trying to get rid of Paul for years at this point, maybe a decade or even two, and Paul is literally walking right into their cradle of power. He knows this. God told him to do this. The churches that he's helped build and shepherd, however, aren't particularly thrilled that their apostle is walking right into the sights of every sniper whose ever wanted him dead. They weep and they beg him to reconsider, but Paul is hardened to his purpose. God wants His apostle to go to the lions, then Paul will go to the lions. These last words are poignant, but that is hardly the point. Paul outlines what he wants the elders of the churches to remember, to do, what is supposed to be most important to them, and thus most important to us.

““You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, 19 serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; 20 how I did not shrink from

declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, 21 testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. 22 And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, 23 except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. 24 But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. 25 And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again.” Paul lays out his life for them. Guys, I've been doing this. I've been taking the risks with you, side by side, preaching to you, teaching you, and now its time for me to finish it up by walking right into the arms of the men trying to kill me. Paul recalls his faithful service to them, which is nice, but it also carries with it an implication for the church at large.

This is what the church does. Not just its leaders, not just folks like me or your elders or whoever. This is what we all do. We don't do it as spectacularly as Paul did, but he is outlining to the churches the whole purpose for their existence. We are Christians, which means we are sinful human beings taken from a sinful world and gathered together around the cross of Jesus to receive His gifts and bask in His mercy. That's what Paul did for the churches. That's what the churches did for each other. That is what you do. House to house, church to church, among yourselves and the church at large throughout the world, we teach what is profitable, that is to say, we teach only the things that are worth teaching. For the church, that means everything that Jesus Christ has ever done, said, or highlighted as important and nothing else.

It is really easy to be distracted by all of the other things going on in the world. Its easy for a church to fall into the trap of teaching things that are false, silly, or just a waste of time. Paul highlights how narrow our priorities are with his dreadfully specific words. We are to teach, we are to celebrate, we are to keep in our minds, as church, repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. That is our center. That is our purpose. Anything that distracts us from that isn't worth our time. Anything that contradicts that

downright contradicts our purpose. We are here to be church. We are not here to be entertainment, frankly we do it very badly. We are not here even to be uplifting for the sake of it. The church is not for psychology, morale boosting, or even helping people cope with various kinds of suffering. That's not the point of it. The point is repentance and faith, the whole of the Biblical message. Everything we are as Christians goes back to those simple, timeless concepts: We are humans, we remain sinners, God hates sin, so we need a way to pay for our sins. God furnishes His Son, crucified, for that payment, and viola, we are now His children. That is what the church is about, and that is what the church has always been about. This is why we don't really try to say much that is new, and in most instances we don't try to do anything new either. The church is timeless because the problem of human beings is timeless, our sins never change throughout history, our problems remain the same no matter how much we evolve or what kind of fancy tech we come up with. Most key, the value of human souls is timeless to God, and He sends His church in every age to harvest more of those souls.

“26 Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, 27 for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. 28 Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. 29 I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. 32 And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”

Paul warns them that the church is united now, but afterwards the wolves will come. From within the midst of God's own people will come God's worst enemies, and God's worst enemy is, by far, the heretic. Heresy, false teaching, is far more dangerous to us than any physical threat. People can threaten us with guns or bombs all day long, that means very little in the long run, because guns, bombs, physical violence, these kinds of

things hurt the body. Heresy hurts the soul, it can kill the soul. Teaching a Jesus that is not the Jesus of the Bible twists the souls of men, and it robs them of that salvation. This is a harsh truth, it gives me no joy to remind you of this, but it is so important for us to remember that the lies are always the biggest threat, and we live in a world built on them. We live with devices that beam them into our eyeballs all the live long day. The words of Jesus tell us who He is, what He wants, and what He gives us. Change that, you and don't have those things anymore. This is why we cling even to the littlest of details with some serious stubbornness. As our beloved church staff has discovered on more than one occasion, I am not a detail man. I'm just very bad at them. If there is anyone in the world to tell you that you can ignore something or just not care, it would be me, and I echo Paul telling you, God is in the details. God's peace and promise are in the details of our doctrine. We try to get it as right as we possibly can because we're following St. Paul's example here. The whole counsel of God is for our good, for our benefit. The whole counsel of God brings us the whole of God's love, shows us the whole of God's heart. Anything less than that and we rob God of His nuance, the texture of His love, the details of His service to us and His dedication to us. So we won't. We'll take the whole thing with interest.

Paul's closing words are our encouragement. It is very easy to look out upon the world, to look upon the complexity and the difficulty of the Christian faith, and know despair. Let's face it, human beings are getting a lot dumber as the years go by, and communicating the Christian faith, talking about, seems like it only gets harder. The lies get more nuanced, and in many instances get a lot more airtime, and it seems like there are more of them every day. It seems like God has given us a job that is impossible to do. But look at what Paul says. I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance. God's Word is sufficient for any task. God's Word is enough for any age, any man, any woman, any child, no matter how debased, no matter how misled, no matter how distracted. God's Word is enough. The Bible in all its power will triumph over the liars, will be heard over the noise of this world. God will use His Word to save His people in every age. He will never stop. He will never

fail. He will never tire. The Bible will build you up, dear brothers and sisters in Christ. It will build your church into a bastion of the truth, as it remains today. It will stand you strong against every lie, showing you the truth of Christ, showing you God's love for you, His dedication to you, His care for you. Jesus is enough. Let everything else go.

Amen.