

Lectionary C April 17, 2016 Easter 4  
Grace and Peace Lutheran Church, Evansville, Indiana  
Pastor Roberta Meyer

Acts 9:36-43  
Psalm 23  
Revelation 7:9-17  
John 10:22-30

### **The Answer Is the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm**

I was asked a question this week. It was from a young mother who is dealing with mental illness. Her disease is one that is not accepted very well in society. She has lost her marriage and the custody of her daughter. She said to me, “OK, theologian, preacher girl, I have a question for you—if God is so loving why would God give me talents and gifts and a beautiful daughter and then give me this horrible disease and take everything away from me. Why would God do this to me?”

Well, I think I answered her all right, that God isn’t doing this horrible thing to her and that God is with her in all this, but I wish I had studied the Psalm for today first, because I see the answer to her question in the first sentence of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. *“The Lord is my shepherd,”*

God is not a puppeteer who stands above us and pulls strings to control everything we do and everything that happens to us. No, God is our shepherd. God is right here walking the terrain of our lives with us every step of the way. So what does a shepherd do? It is a lot more than just walking with sheep.

I went through the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm and highlighted all the things it says our shepherd God does. First of all, it starts out with he makes me lie down in green pastures. One time when I was teaching school I was going full speed, doing the normal teaching stuff, planning, grading, going to meetings, along with that being a mom stuff, and I also had some church stuff and—well, lets just say I was pretty busy. Then all of a sudden I got shingles and the doctor ordered me to take a week off! No way, how could I do that? I had no choice. A fellow teacher friend of mine smiled lovingly and said, “You have just been “23<sup>rd</sup> Psalmied”. God made you lie down in green pastures.” And that was pretty much what it was because since the shingles were caught really quickly, I didn’t have a lot of pain, and it was about this time of year. That whole week was in the 70s and bright and sunny. I spent my time out in the shade by the lake on our farm. Sometimes the shepherd has to take that long staff and make the sheep lie down and take a rest.

Next comes, *he leads me beside still waters;*” God leads us to places that quench our thirst. A leader gets out there in front and shows the sheep where to go. A leader shows the sheep where refreshment is.

And all this lying around in green pastures and lapping up the still waters sort of gives us a new start. The Good Shepherd *“restores my soul.”* God has wisdom that we aren’t capable of having. God knows exactly what we need to refresh us and restore our strength.

Because a good shepherd knows things aren't always be sunny. We won't always see the best way to go. When that happens our shepherd "*leads [us] in right paths for his name's sake.*" Sometimes we sheep get stubborn and want to veer from the path our shepherd is leading us down, but the shepherd will not lead us astray.

It is inevitable that rough patches will come. Those dark valleys are full of jagged rocks and sharp thorns. But the thing is the shepherd is right there with us in those dark scary places in life and we are not afraid. That good ole rod and staff reaches out — *and comforts [us].*

And then what does the shepherd do? The shepherd gets things ready for us. The shepherd prepares things for us so we are strong and ready for whatever life deals us. The shepherd feeds us the things we need to be strong and brave as we face "enemies" in life. We are fed the Lord's Supper, Christ's body and blood.

Then comes the anointing. The process of cleansing and healing and choosing. The Shepherd *anoints the sheep with oil; there is an overflowing abundance. The richness of this anointing oil drips down all over us, surrounding us with God's blessing. Why, God's lambs literally swim in God's blessings.*