



Eastern North Dakota Synod's 22nd annual

God's work. Our hands. *Synod Assembly*

May 3, 2009 **Homily**

"A Post-Flood Journey through the 23rd Psalm"

based on the Psalm for the day

**The Lord is my shepherd**, When the Lord is your shepherd several things are true. First, sheep don't go interviewing which shepherd they wish to follow. It is the shepherd who purchases or raises them and calls them by name. Through water and the Word and our trust in that Word, God makes us His sheep. Through the God-given gift of faith, we become children of God, heirs of the kingdom. While growing up in elementary school, one could often hear words like "My big brother could beat up your big brother" or "My mom's better than your mom." Having the "biggest and best" protector, provider, defender back in elementary school was pretty important. It's even more important now.

**I shall not want.** In the Small Catechism, Martin Luther reminds us "God give daily bread to all people, though sinful" and that daily bread includes all that is needed for life. We have had an amazing spring. Instead of manna, as we have fought the storms and floods, we have seen God's providing of "daily bread" in the forms of good government, amazing friends and neighbors (some of whom we did not even know!), and something called favorable weather. While we might be inclined to argue with the Creator of the universe over what constitutes "favorable," several times we have received what we needed just when we needed it.

All people receive daily bread. [*Optional Humor to make a point: A farmer and his family brought his son to college. They stopped as a family at a local eatery for lunch, where they were surrounded by lots of college students and "city types." The farmer lead his family in table grace and at the conclusion, one of the students inquired, "Hey Hayseed, does everybody do that where you're from?" After a slight pause, the farmer replied, "I guess everyone except the pigs."*] Perhaps the Good Shepherd wants us to realize where this daily bread comes from and to receive it with thanksgiving.

**He makes me lie down in green pastures--** At the end of a long winter, any sign of life is encouraging. On the hillsides of Israel, it can be a long walk between patches of grass. Sometimes one can't even see the grass, there is so much space between the blades. Do you know green pasture when you see it? Do you recognize those times and places when the shepherd wants you to rest? So many times we don't have time for life, wishing for some "better" day to come. That thing about remembering the Sabbath... it is meant to be a gift from God to you and me. The great philosopher, Yogi Berra, once said, "When you see a fork in the road, take it." Next time you see a green pasture, take time to enjoy the rest. You may need that time of recovery for the journey.

**he leads me beside still waters;** Perhaps you have had enough of water this spring. The truth is we need water. Our bodies need it to survive. Water is becoming one of the most precious resources in the world. In spite of our recent dislike of water, may we give thanks, even with floods fresh in our memories. Martin Luther often spoke of needing to be reminded of his own Baptism. That water is a life-giving water... through it **he restores my soul** by washing away our sins and giving us His

righteousness. Without the leading of this gracious shepherd to and through still waters, we would surely perish.

**He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.** Have you ever wondered why the Creator of the Universe wants to be in relationship with you? You are the crowning glory of God's good creation. You also have the capacity to drag God's name down. How many of you grew up in a small town? You know what I'm talking about when I say, "Aren't you \_\_\_\_'s son? Aren't you \_\_\_\_\_'s daughter?" Part of the reason for the way in which you lived your life in the small community was to bring pride, not shame, to your parents. We commission each "newborn soldier of the Crucified" to "Let your light so shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." Did you catch who gets the glory? (pause) Are you willing to share or even release that glory to the good shepherd who is leading you?

**Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff-- they comfort me.** Valleys can be wonderful places to live. They are often filled with streams and meadows, sometimes even rich, flat farm land. But as we have seen throughout our state this past spring, valleys can have attitudes, valleys can be dangerous, valleys can threaten life. The strange thing about valleys is that without some high places, there is no valley. While this may seem obvious, it is important that valleys are only for a time or season. Even while we are in the deepest, darkest valleys, our Shepherd never leaves us. The rod and staff that are meant to frighten off and defend against that which would assail us bring comfort. We are not destined for destruction, but we are precious in the sight of our good shepherd. In the novel, "The Shack," the character representing God the Father often says when someone is brought up, "I'm especially fond of him or her." The main character replies, "You seem especially fond of a lot of people." God created you, shepherds you and loves you with an everlasting love. Deal with it. I hope it brings you comfort to know that God is especially fond of you. :-)

**You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.** Have you seen the video on You Tube or even on national TV of the flood in Fargo set to music. It will bring a tear to your eye, maybe even more than a few. Bishop Larry Wohlrabe of NW MN synod commented "So many times disasters are called "acts of God." Yet the real acts of God are seen in the filling or passing of a sandbag by total strangers to help you save your home, in the making of a sandwich by hands too weak to lift 40 pounds, in consoling phone calls and well wishes posted on blogs by those who are praying for you from literally around the world." We are blessed to be part of such a community, part of such a flock, sheep of such a shepherd. In fact, it's overwhelming if you allow yourself to feel it... it overflows... (pause)

**Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.** By now you can tell that this last verse is obvious. It flows from all we have seen and heard in the verses before. The great love we have witnessed from the best shepherd of all will indeed carry us though anything. I mean that... anything. There is nothing in all of creation that will be able to separate us from the Love of God. Jesus has indeed gone to prepare a place for us so that where he is, we may be also. And He will come again and take us home, where as beloved sons and daughters we will see and taste the goodness of God forever. Amen? Amen!