

1The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

2He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;

3he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

4Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me.

5You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

6Surely 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.

Four o'clock on a blustery March morning – the alarm went off – I threw on my blue jeans and a sweatshirt – a coat, gloves, a stocking cap and headed for the barn. Time to check for newborn lambs.

I remember the warm glow of a bare electric bulb, freshly scattered yellow straw, gates arranged for a makeshift pen, a mother sheep (a ewe) and a wobbly lamb. This lamb had been born some hours before but it did not look as if it he had been getting anything to eat. Each time the lamb came near to suck the ewe moved away. I tried to pin the ewe against the wall with my body and hold the lamb up to the nipple to suck – the ewe struggled to escape my hold and so did the lamb – the more I pushed the lamb's head forward the harder the lamb pulled back. I decided it was time for some help – I went to the house and woke up my mom.

Together we returned to the barn – I held the ewe, my mom worked gently with the lamb, by the time I needed to get ready for school all was well with this ewe and lamb.

As I think back on all of that I mostly remember my frustration as I pushed the lamb's head toward the nipple and the lamb's determined strength in pulling away. Here I was trying to save his life and he resisted me in every way.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want, he makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside still waters, he restores my soul, he leads me in paths of righteousness for his names sake.

Don't you wish it was like that – you and Jesus on the same page? Jesus leading – you following – never resisting – never pulling back – perfectly trusting. Jesus says, “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink or about your body what you will wear. Your heavenly Father knows all that you need. Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.”

Jesus invites us to forgive those who sin against us and to turn the other cheek when we are struck and to go the second mile. Jesus is a shepherd leading us in paths that are right –good paths. But like that little lamb maybe we resist.

Now David who wrote the 23rd Psalm knew that even for those who trust in the Lord, things are not always easy. Sure, he brought down the mighty warrior Goliath with a slingshot and a stone but shortly after that the king of Israel, Saul, was hunting David to kill him and David was hiding in a cave. For a time David was on the run – even had to go and live in the land of the enemy – the Philistines. But even as he walked through that dark valley he trusted that the Lord would bring him to green pastures once more.

While David and his men were hiding in a dark cave Saul came in to relieve himself. David's men encouraged David to kill Saul and take over the throne right there. But David refused – instead he cut off a corner of Saul's cloak. When Saul and his men had gone to the opposite hill David came out and held up the material he had cut off – letting Saul know that David could have taken Saul's life but did not. David trusted in the Lord that day rather than trusting in his own power.

What keeps us from trusting? Well, that little lamb may have thought I was not really on his side and he would have been right. Oh, that morning I wanted to help him but the day would come when I would load him on the truck to send him to the slaughterhouse.

The image of shepherd in ancient times was used for the king. In some of the prophets Israel's kings were spoken of as shepherds. Now most kings are served by the people rather than serving the people. The people pay

taxes and march in the king's army and obey the king's laws so that the king may prosper. I was not in the sheep business for the sake of the sheep but for my profit. The same with most kings and rulers.

What about God? Is God mostly interested in you because of what God can get out of you? Through the centuries religious leaders have claimed to speak for God but sometimes they have simply been feathering their own nests. Their wealth, their power, their glory is in the center. But the shepherd Jesus is different.

When he leads you into forgiving and giving and sacrificing it is not so that he can take something from you but give something to you. Do not pull away but let him guide you. Jesus said that he came that you might have life and have it abundantly – not more stuff – but life the way God has intended life to be. For Jesus letting his Father be his shepherd led to a table where he shared his cup with the one who would betray him, and where his head was anointed in preparation for his death, but he trusted his father all the way through the dark valley of his dying and his trust was not in vain. The Father led him to the green pastures of life beyond death.

Now Jesus leads you to those same pastures.

Jesus, the Lord is your shepherd, you shall not want. He will lead you to green pastures and beside still waters and he shall renew and restore your life. He will lead you in right paths for his name's sake. Even when you walk through the darkest valley do not be afraid, Jesus will be with you, his strength and power will protect you. Even when you are among your enemies he will provide and bless you now and forever.

Trust in him. Amen.

