

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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SERMON: *Green Pastures*

SERIES: *Psalm 23*

SCRIPTURES: *Psalm 23:2-3*

SPEAKER: *Shaun Kipe*

DATE: *2022 - 3 - 27*

**Credit to...Dallas Willard, Scott Scruggs, W. Phillip Keller*

Well good morning, it so great to worship with you. Want to say welcome to all of you gathered on-line, at home, tuning in to the live stream.

We're in this series walking through Psalm 23 (**SERIES GRAPHIC**)...a Psalm that many people know, but not nearly as many of us are actually living in the full reality of the Psalm.

Dallas Willard writes, ***“One of our greatest needs today is for people to really see and really believe the things they already profess to see and believe.”***

Last week we looked at the very first verse of the Psalm...

“The Lord is my Shepherd, I lack nothing...” Do you live your life as if that is true? If you did what your life look like? How would your attitude change? How would your language, temper change? Your pursuits and priorities in life...material, relational, occupational...how would they change?

What does a life look like that lives in the fullness of Psalm 23? That's what this series is all about.

And it's why I'm encouraging you to spend some time each day reading through, even memorizing the words to Psalm 23. Reading slowly, and thinking carefully about the words you are reading.

This morning we want to talk about...

A. Green pastures, quiet waters, right paths.

Verses two and three today...so if you have a Bible go ahead and open it to Psalm 23. Again, we're not as concerned about the version you are using. Some of us grew up memorizing the KJV. In most of our preaching here at Five Forks we tend use the NIV. And I would encourage you to check out other versions as well and compare and contrast them.

Psalm 23:2-3 - ²He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters,³he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.

This is some beautiful imagery, isn't it? So everyone just pause for a moment...close your eyes, don't fall asleep, but close your eyes, what image comes to mind when you think about peaceful rest? **(SERIES GRAPHIC)** I love the sermon graphic that Beth made for this sermon series. It helps to capture an image in our minds of these words. A picture of serenity, contentment, restfulness.

Now, teacher Scott Scruggs points out that one of things that should leap off the page in this section, but probably doesn't to most of us because we're not middle eastern Shepherds is...what the sheep are doing and not doing?

This whole image of sheep, lying down in green pastures and walking along quiet waters...while beautiful is actually almost shocking (W Phillip Keller pg. 41). So let me talk you through some of this...

First, we should notice that the

1. Sheep are not eating...

(Keller pg. 52)

They are lying down in the green pastures. If you know anything about sheep, you know that this is very unusual behavior. In fact, I didn't know this until I was studying for this sermon but Sheep can be "over-eaters". At times they can even be a little bit like fish. You know how if you feed fish too much they'll just keep eating...even to the point of killing themselves, particularly when it comes to green alfalfa.

True story LA Times, happened back in the early 90's about 83 sheep that actually ate themselves to death! (Scruggs) They couldn't control their appetite. They didn't know how to stop consuming and say **"that's enough"**. What's so fascinating about the imagery of the sheep in Psalm 23 is that surrounded by lush green pastures they have said, "that's enough." They have stopped consuming and are just lying down "green pastures."

We may be inclined to think, I'm glad I'm not like sheep. I would never consume to the point of death. But I want you to think for a minute about the way in which we humans also have trouble controlling our own appetites. And I'm not talking specifically about food, though we could include that on our list of indulgences. When was the last time you thought, we have enough, we don't need any more. We have enough money. We enough house. We have enough car. We have enough clothes. We have enough...for most of us we are in the constant chase for more!

I'll just give you one example of this, so much of the commercial advertising industry plays on this part of the human psyche...you don't have enough yet. You need "this" in order to be complete.

Any Ikea shoppers out there. Have you ever had this experience: You go to there to buy a kitchen table and walk out with a cartload full of junk and you're almost bewildered about how it happened, all you came for was that table. I was reading an article a couple of weeks ago about how Ikea has mastered their marketing and shopping experience in such a way:

It's estimated that **60% of Ikea purchases are impulse buys**. Ikea's own creative director has said he believes that only 20% of the store's purchases are based on actual logic and needs.

They are very strategic in how they lay out their stores. You must make a trek almost a complete mile to get through the store. And as you trek, you pass by every sale they have going on. If you see something you may want, you tend to pick it up and put it in your cart because you don't want to have to walk the whole way back and find it. They strategically lay out various rooms put together to suggest this is how your home could look if you just has this kitchen, living room, bedroom. They price their items in such a way that encourage you to buy them.

But in the end, from the layout to the pricing what they are playing on is our insatiable desire for more. They put green pastures around us knowing we will indulge. We don't know how to say, "that's enough."

We make up 5% of the worlds population, but we use up about half of the worlds "stuff." (Claiborne).

Surrounded by green pastures as we are in the wealthiest nation on earth. We are still not satisfied. We are eating the green grass and everyone else's green grass. And we do this not only with stuff, but with our life schedules, with our hobbies, with our eating habits, with our sexual desire. And our greed is keeping us from living in Psalm 23, a life of peaceful rest.

Part of the reason we never experience “peaceful rest” is not because we don’t have something we need, it’s because we live with a constant sense of wanting more no matter how much we already have! I wonder, how would your life change, my life change...if it became our habit to say, “That’s enough”?

Second, notice the...

2. Sheep are not anxious.

We know this because the sheep is laying down. It is at rest.

W. Phillip Keller, I think I share with you last week, spent a number of years as a Shepherd in the Middle East and has written a great little book about Psalm 23. But he says this about his experience with sheep...*“As long as there is even the slightest suspicion of danger...sheep stand up ready to flee for their lives.”* Keller actually recounts a story from his own experience where a friend came to visit his sheep farm. And as their car pulled in, they opened the door and a little puppy jumped out of the car and over 200 sheep fled across the pasture in fear! (pg. 42) But in Psalm 23 the sheep do not appear anxious.

You can surmise this from your own life experience. Have you ever been anxious? What can you not do when you are anxious? Rest. Sit still. Sleep. In fact, according to one study, when do you think is the most common time of the day for people to experience anxiety? 9pm – 3am. (Scruggs)

One of the primary reasons we don’t experience rest is because of the level of anxiety in our lives. We have created a pattern, a habit of anxiety in the way we live. Let’s just get really practical for a moment...Think about it...

I remember being younger and not really liking the beginning of the school year. New teachers, new classroom, new classmates, new schedule, getting good grades. A time of sleepless nights and anxiousness.

And then anxiety about fitting in. Finding a group of people at lunch time, to sit and eat lunch with, so that you're not alone. Anxiety about my appearance. Right clothes, right hair style (**PIC OF HIGH SCHOOL SHAUN**). You can see how well I did on that one. I reason to be concerned about that.

I always kind of imagined, that anxiety was a kid thing. And that some day when I was older, when I grew up, a little more independent then I won't be anxious anymore.

But I've discovered that growing up, doesn't eliminate anxiety from your life. It just changes the things your anxious about.

Now its about my **occupation**. Am I doing a good enough job? Meeting the standards and **expectations**. No joke, every time I sit down to write a sermon, there is always this twinge of worry...what if I don't have anything to say this time? Worse yet, what if the things I'm saying, explaining, describing are wrong. What if it has eternal consequences?!

Anxiety about being a **good parent**. Do you ever worry about that? I used to think, how hard could it be? And I'm gonna have the best-behaved, most well-rounded kids in the world. By the time they can walk, they'll be doing chores and putting themselves to bed. And what I've discovered is that the only people who think that way, are people who don't have kids. I mean there is just no magic formula for parenting. What kind of habits and values are you creating for your family? How strict should you be with **bed-time**? How much **screen time** is appropriate? How many **extra-curricular activities** should you involve your kids in? How did it feel the first time you let your son or daughter, grab the **car keys** and head out the door?

And most of those things are just personal worries. Then you begin to think about anxiety on a grand scale. **Russia and Ukraine, refugees, sex-trafficking, drug epidemic, shootings and natural disasters, climate control.**

Anyone have some anxiety this morning? Some of you are thinking I wasn't really that anxious until I walked in here and sat down and listened to your sermon. Now I'm getting a little anxious.

Truth is life can be full of anxiety. Do you know what we're not doing? Resting. In Psalm 23 the sheep is resting. We're not living in the reality of Psalm 23.

3. Sheep are not fighting with other sheep.

(Keller pg. 46)

In the animal world, there is always a hierarchy. Among chickens it's called a pecking order, among cattle it's called a "horning order" and among sheep it's called a "butting-order." The more powerful sheep get the better food, shelter, advantages. There is a constant struggle for power, status, control.

Sadly we humans are not that different from Sheep are we. Somehow we seem to be in this same constant struggle for power and status. Always comparing ourselves to the people around us. Always trying to have a little more.

And we humans are so similar aren't we? Where do you see this struggle for power and status? World Order. (Who's gonna be on top? Who's gonna have bigger weapons.). Politics. It happens in homes, with families. Who gets to make the final decision? In our house it's who gets to brush their teeth last at bedtime?

You cannot live fighting with other sheep and then claim Psalm 23 over your life.

And this happens to be one of the ways in which social media is not helpful. So easy to “stock” other people and see what they are up to, what their lives are like...and compare ourselves. This comparison game has two detrimental side-effects. One I become judgmental and prideful...thinking look I have more than others. My life is better than others. Or two, it can lead to greed and shame...I wish I had what they have.

By the way, I know sometimes I’m harsh in pointing out the dangers or the failure of social media. I do want to acknowledge the benefits I have seen as well. I have definitely seen families, even recently, that are hurting receive incredible encouragement, prayer, and support through social media in a way that would not have been possible if social media did not exist. So let’s hang on to the good and at the same time be aware of and thoughtful about some of the dangers.

But in Psalm 23, I think we are to notice that the sheep are not in this fight for control, power, status. They are simply resting.

And then fourth the...

4. Sheep are not on a harmful or self-destructive path...

(Keller pg. 83)

Again, I was reading about this, but did you know Sheep will keep walking and grazing in the same spot. Until the grass is gone and the ground is bare and water is polluted. All the while they have no idea their life is in danger. Unless there is a shepherd to guide them and move them on to another location. In fact there must be a deliberate and thoughtful plan of rotation from one grazing ground to the next. This is the idea that David had in mind when he spoke of path’s of righteousness. We too must follow a deliberate and thoughtful path in life.

And oh how we humans are so much the same way. We insist that we know what is best for ourselves, often unaware of the damage being done in our lives (Keller pg. 88)

Isaiah 53:6 - we all like sheep have gone astray, each turning to our own way...

We just did an entire series on the habits we create for ourselves and how so often habits the things we do without thinking about it.

Our diet, leisure, work, relationships, our language, our attitudes with no thought for how these things are impacting our lives. Eating away, over-indulging on the green grass, polluting the water...without a thought for the danger we are in.

But in Psalm 23 the sheep is not a self-destructive path. He is on the path of right living.

Are you starting to get the picture of this Psalm in your mind? **Animals that are usually consumed with their appetites, unsatisfied, fearful, self-destructive are content.** (Scruggs) David uses the language he “refreshes my soul.” It’s a life that is filled up...quenched...satisfied.

Which begs the question...**how is this picture of life even possible?**

B. The Shepherd.

²He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters,³he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name’s sake.

Do you notice the order of the pronouns in these verses?

1. He before me...

(Scruggs/Keller pg. 42)

Keller recalls one occasion where he was watching a shepherd lead his flock of sheep down a mountain to a magnificent mountain stream. Clear, clean, pure, cold water. But as the herd wandered down the mountain several stubborn sheep stopped to drink from small, dirty, muddy pools along the trail. The water was filthy and polluted...he says, **“Still these stubborn sheep seemed quite sure it was the best drink obtainable.”**

CS Lewis - We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”

See there's a lot of people in our world who are seeking contentment, peace, security, rest...but we're trying to do it our way. I love God as long he gives me what I love.

But that's not the pattern offered to us in Psalm 23. In Psalm 23, God's will must come before my will. Left to myself I will be consumed by my own greed, anxiety, pride...I will self-destruct. It's the natural pattern for sheep it's the natural pattern for humans.

Proverbs 14:12 – ¹² There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.

The sheep must surrender its life to the Shepherd. You must surrender your life to the Shepherd.

Matthew 10 – “Whoever finds their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.”

Matthew 11:28 - “Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.”

God before my dreams and plans about life. Or you more like me, I make my plans about life and then invite Jesus to tag along in case I need help along the way.

God before my occupation.

God before entertainment.

God before sexual desire.

God before money.

As long as I keep putting my primary desire ahead of God, I'll always be unsatisfied.

Saint Augustine, **“O God, thou hast made us for thyself, and our souls are restless, searching, ‘til they find their rest in thee.”** (Keller 59)

Am I willing to trust God with what matters most in my life? Are you willing to surrender your life, your will, your desires to Him? That's what Psalm 23:2-3 is suggesting. He before me.

Second, after you surrender to the Shepherd, you'll have to get serious about...

2. Following his voice

Did you pick up on some the language David uses here...

He leads me and he guides me...

Jesus says it like this,

John 10:27 - ²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

Sheep will recognize a lot of voices...but they only follow one. The voice of their shepherd.

There was a professor from the university of Durham in England who was studying in Israel. And she was walking on a road near Bethlehem. And at one point she saw three different Shepherds all converge on the same location as they had a conversation. And while they spoke their three separate flocks started to intermingle and wonder and get mixed and they weren't marked or branded or tagged in any way. But the shepherds did not have to go and physically separate them out when they were through talking. Instead they just began to walk their separate ways and call for their sheep! And one by one the sheep followed their shepherd. (Scruggs)

See when you find Jesus, when you begin to follow his voice...you begin to follow him. You begin to walk in his ways and in his right path.

Materialism doesn't hold that same power over you. You learn how Jesus viewed money and possessions and food. You start to view it the same way.

You are able to say, "That's enough." This week, I want you to consider the life situations you find yourself in. And instead of indulging yourself this week practice saying "No, that's enough." I won't eat one more, buy one more, binge more. Take this idea one step further and consider fasting or abstaining from something specific this week.

And it's fascinating what happens is that when materialism and greed no longer hold sway over you...all of a sudden you discover you have so much to share with others. You become generous.

When you follow Jesus voice...many of those things that cause **anxiety and worry** don't overwhelm you anymore. It's not that they just go away or disappear, it's just

they are no longer overwhelm you because you start living in the reality of Jesus security and peace.

And so I want to encourage you this week, when you find yourself experiencing anxiety. Pause this week and pray and ask for Jesus security in your life. “The Lord is my shepherd.”

Philippians 4 - ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Now just a quick qualifier here related to anxiety. Sometimes in order to overcome worry in our lives you need to go see a professional. Sometimes Christians talk about worry as if it's something God just makes go away if you have enough faith. And while trusting in God is crucial. It has been my own experience that God often works through people such as health care professionals, doctors, counselors.

Maybe this is the time you need to seek extra help, make that phone call this week.

When I follow his voice, I no longer need to **compare myself** to others, because my eyes are focused on him not those around me. Instead of fighting other sheep...you learn how Jesus treated other people. Particularly those who were poor and neglected. And enemies. We're going to talk more about that in two weeks.

And you see what happens as we surrender to “He before me” and then follow his voice is that...

3. He restores my soul...

Or he refreshes me.

Notice the Shepherd is leading the sheep to abundant pastures and plentiful waters and a filled up soul. He is leading the sheep to abundance and fullness and life.

I think so many people have trouble putting God first and following his voice, his way of life, because they're afraid he'll take all their fun away.

But in Psalm 23, David reminds us that God wants what is best for you. He wants to be good to you, generous with you. He wants to help you live the way you were created to live. A life that is flourishing.

One of the key things in order to experience this refreshing or restoring of the soul, is sitting still long enough to receive good things from God. Notice the pace of the sheep in these verses. He is walking beside the quiet waters, he is still long enough to bask in the green pasture.

God wants to be good to you, generous with you, you must slow down long enough to receive it!