

Enhancing Your Worship

Meditating on God's Word and Works

I will meditate on your wondrous works. Psalm 119:27
My eyes are awake through the night watches,
That I may meditate on Your word. Psalm 119:148 NKJV

The Week of the Fourth Sunday of Easter

Good Shepherd Sunday

May 4 - May 9

Introduction

Most modern forms of mediation turn a person inward. Biblical meditation turns a person outward toward what God has said and done especially what He has said and done through Jesus for our salvation.

Each Sunday has its own special theme directing us to meditate on God's word and actions. This theme is found in the Propers of the Day (the parts of the service that change week to week). From Advent through the Easter season these themes focus our attention on the life of Jesus from His birth to His death and resurrection. There is always much more in the propers than can be covered in any Sunday service. God willing, I will use the propers for Sunday to provide you with a devotion each day to help you mediate on what God has done for you.

Monday

The Lord's My Shepherd, I'll Not Want – 1

The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want;
He makes me down to lie
In pastures green; He leadeth me
The quiet waters by.

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L Christ is Risen!

C He is Risen indeed! Alleluia!

L In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C Amen.

L Alleluia. We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. Alleluia.

C Alleluia. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me. Alleluia.

(Romans 6:9; John 10:14)

Introit Psalm 95:1–3, 6–7a; antiphon: John 10:14, 15b

L I am the good shepherd.

I know my own and my own know me, and I lay down my life for the sheep.

G **Oh come, let us sing to the Lord;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!**

L Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!

G **For the Lord is a great God,
and a great King above all gods.**

L Oh come, let us worship and bow down;
let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!

G **For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.
Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

L I am the good shepherd.

I know my own and my own know me, and I lay down my life for the sheep.

Most Americans do not have firsthand knowledge of the beautiful imagery invoked by Jesus when He describes himself as a shepherd and we, His people, as sheep. In Bible times, this imagery was well known to the people.

When Samuel first sought to anoint David as the successor to King Saul, David was tending sheep. When Jesus was born, angels announced His birth to shepherds. Those who travel to the Holy Land today may still catch a glimpse of shepherds and sheep along the road from Jerusalem to Jericho.

Tending and caring for sheep was essential for their wellbeing. The Twenty-third Psalm gives us an indication of a shepherd's task when we read:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.

Still, there was much more to tending sheep than making sure that they were well fed and watered. When Israel was threatened by the Philistines with their champion named Goliath, David told Saul, "Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him. Your servant has struck down both lions and bears" (1 Samuel 17:34-36).

Indeed, there was great danger involved in tending the flock. It required skill, courage, and strength to defend it against lions and bears.

In John 10, Jesus uses this marvelous image of a shepherd and sheep to speak of His relationship with His people. The shepherd would guard and tend his sheep 24 hours a day. He learned to know each one thoroughly and they knew him. So also is our relationship with Jesus. It is intimate and personal. There is nothing that He doesn't know about you. And He wants you to know as much as possible about Him and His love for you.

But there is one more stunning fact Jesus wants us to know about Him as the Good Shepherd. He not only tends and guards the flock. He not only defends it in the same way David fought off attackers. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, lays down His life for the sheep.

This self-sacrifice of a shepherd for the sheep was something that even people of His day would find hard to imagine. Yes, shepherds would tend sheep. Shepherds would guide sheep. But shepherds would not die for sheep. Nevertheless, this is the image that Jesus brings our minds. The Shepherd dying for the sheep!

This amazing truth is impossible to comprehend. Yet it is the heart of the Christian faith. Christianity is not mainly about being good, nice, and upright in our lives (although we should). Christianity is all about what the Good Shepherd has done for us! Christianity is about the Shepherd dying of the sheep.

Prayer: Dear Shepherd, thank you for calling me by name and tending to my needs of body and soul. Grant that we may ever be faithful sheep in the flock of your Church. During this time of anxiety and distress in our nation, give us the peace of knowing that goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our lives. Amen.

Tuesday

The Lord's My Shepherd, I'll Not Want – 2

My soul He doth restore again
And me to walk doth make
Within the paths of righteousness,
E'en for His own name's sake.

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L Christ is Risen!

C **He is Risen indeed! Alleluia!**

L In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C **Amen.**

L Alleluia. We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. Alleluia.

C **Alleluia. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me. Alleluia.**

(Romans 6:9; John 10:14)

Collect of the Day

L Let us pray. Almighty God, merciful Father, since You have wakened from death the Shepherd of Your sheep, grant us Your Holy Spirit that when we hear the voice of our Shepherd we may know Him who calls us each by name and follow where He leads; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C **Amen**

The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep! This is good news for us in the flock. Let us not forget that God also awakened our Shepherd from death on Easter morn. Our Easter joy continues even as we focus on Jesus as the Good Shepherd.

Jesus' resurrection gives us a reason to sing with unrestrained joy as the Psalmist invites us:

“Oh come, let us sing to the Lord;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!” (Psalm 95:1).

As we sing and make a joyful noise to the Lord, the rock of our salvation, consider how **Crown Him with Many Crowns** might be considered an appropriate hymn for Easter and Good Shepherd Sunday.



1 Crown Him with man - y crowns, The Lamb up - on His throne;
 2 Crown Him the vir - gin's Son, The God in - car - nate born,
 3 Crown Him the Lord of love. Be - hold His hands and side,
 4 Crown Him the Lord of life, Who tri - umphed o'er the grave



Hark how the heav'n-ly an - them drowns All mu - sic but its own.
 Whose arm those crim - son tro - phies won Which now His brow a - dorn:
 Rich wounds, yet vis - i - ble a - bove, In beau - ty glo - ri - fied.
 And rose vic - to - rious in the strife For those He came to save.



A - wake, my soul, and sing Of Him who died for thee, And
 Fruit of the mys - tic rose, Yet of that rose the stem, The
 No an - gels in the sky Can ful - ly bear that sight, But
 His glo - ries now we sing, Who died and rose on high, Who



hail Him as thy match - less king Through all e - ter - ni - ty.
 root whence mer - cy ev - er flows, The babe of Beth - le - hem.
 down - ward bend their won - d'ring eyes At mys - ter - ies so bright.
 died e - ter - nal life to bring And lives that death may die.

Crown Him the Lord of heav'n,
 Enthroned in worlds above,
 Crown Him the king to whom is giv'n
 The wondrous name of Love.
 Crown Him with many crowns
 As thrones before Him fall;
 Crown Him, ye kings, with many crowns,
 For He is king of all.

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Prayer: Dear Good Shepherd, we rejoice that you awoke from death on Easter morning. Grant that we would make a joyful noise as we kneel before the Lord, our Maker! For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. Amen.

Wednesday

The Lord's My Shepherd, I'll Not Want – 3

Yea, though I walk in death's dark vale,
 Yet will I fear no ill;
 For Thou art with me, and Thy rod
 And staff me comfort still.

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- L** Christ is Risen!
- C** He is Risen indeed! Alleluia!

- L** In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
- C** Amen.

L Alleluia. We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. Alleluia.

C Alleluia. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me. Alleluia.

(Romans 6:9; John 10:14)

Psalm 23 King James Version

L The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

C He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

L He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

C Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

L Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

C Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

There is an old joke that ends like this. Whenever you have two Lutherans (Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, or Catholics) in a room, you will have three opinions. People have a natural tendency to hold strong opinions. Christians are not immune. In fact, we may have reason to be extra firm in our beliefs since we are dealing with things of eternal significance.

The sad truth is that, this side of heaven, Christians will disagree. Sometimes it will be about important matters and sometimes unimportant.

Still we agree on many things. Two of the most noticeable places where Christians agree are speaking the Lord's Prayer and the 23rd Psalm using King James language. (I might also add to that list the account of Jesus' birth recorded in Luke 2 as recited by Linus in "A Charlie Brown Christmas.")

Throughout the years, people have noticed my clergy collar while visiting in the hospital. Sometimes strangers will grab me and ask if I would visit a loved one who is sick and possibly dying. In these sad and stressful situations I will often pray the Lord's Prayer and speak the 23rd Psalm in the language of the King James Bible. Almost without exception, all the gathered family and friends will join with me speaking these words from memory.

These comforting words have touched the hearts of the flock wherever Christians are found and by whatever name they are called. We share with believers around the world comfort that comes from knowing the Good Shepherd and His love for the sheep. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Prayer: Dear Good Shepherd, you make me to lie down in green pastures and you lead me beside the still waters. Grant that during this time of pandemic, social distancing, and isolation that I may have peace and comfort while walking through the Valley of the Shadow of Death. Grant that I would fear no evil, knowing that you are protecting me with your rod and staff. Amen.

Thursday

The Lord's My Shepherd, I'll Not Want – 4

My table Thou hast furnishèd
In presence of my foes;
My head Thou dost with oil anoint,
And my cup overflows.

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L Christ is Risen!

C He is Risen indeed! Alleluia!

L In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C Amen.

L Alleluia. We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. Alleluia.

C Alleluia. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me. Alleluia.

(Romans 6:9; John 10:14)

Acts 2:42-47

⁴²And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

In this reading from Acts, we continue to follow the journey of the post-resurrection Christian Church. During these weeks following Easter, we should be reminded that we are the post-resurrection Church of our day. Many things have changed in the world since then but this remains true: The Good Shepherd has laid down His life for the sheep and He has taken it up again!

Following Jesus' ascension into heaven, the Apostles carried on with Jesus' ministry. They were devoted to teaching Jesus' word to all the faithful. Should things be different today? Do we not also need to faithfully hear Jesus' words?

They also devoted themselves to fellowship. During this time of when we are forced to stay in our homes and church services are canceled, I have heard it said many times how people long to return to church. Yes, we can stream services online. We can have home worship services. But this time of social distancing has brought home the reality that nothing can replace the face to face fellowship that we enjoy in our congregations. How sad it is that in normal times so many who call themselves Christians chose to absent themselves from the fellowship of believers!

Clearly, the early Church gathered regularly for worship and the Lord's Supper. In our reading for today, it is called "the breaking of bread and the prayers." It is no accident that the Bible calls us the flock of the Good Shepherd. Sheep live in flocks. Those who wander off find themselves in extreme danger. When we are able, may we be faithful in gathering regularly for "the breaking of bread and the prayers."

The early Church was known for sharing. They cared for those who had needs with glad and generous hearts. During this time of national stress and difficulty, job loss, and pay cuts, can we be any less generous with those in need?

When the Church acts like the Flock of the Good Shepherd, it is no wonder that their number was added to day by day. May we truly be the post-resurrection Church of our day. The Good Shepherd has laid down His life for us that we may live eternally with Him. The gladness of heart that we experience in the resurrection moves us to hear God's word, join in fellowship and worship, and to be generous with those in need.

Prayer: O Good Shepherd, You have shown us ultimate generosity by laying down Your life for the sheep. Grant that your gift of life will give comfort to our souls that we to may be faithful and generous. Amen.

Friday

The Lord's My Shepherd, I'll Not Want – 5

Goodness and mercy all my life
Shall surely follow me;
And in God's house forevermore
My dwelling place shall be.

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L Christ is Risen!

C He is Risen indeed! Alleluia!

L In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C Amen.

L Alleluia. We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. Alleluia.

C Alleluia. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me. Alleluia.

(Romans 6:9; John 10:14)

1 Peter 2:19-25

¹⁹For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. ²⁰For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. ²¹For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. ²²He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. ²³When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. ²⁵For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Life isn't fair! Have you ever heard those words? There is a misconception that Christian people who have enough faith, pray enough, tithe enough, and live righteous lives will be granted prosperity and earthly blessings. Peter helps correct this notion when he tells us that it is "a gracious thing" when we endure sorrows while "suffering unjustly."

This time of pandemic has brought home again how often we suffer through no fault of our own. None of us is responsible for this terrible virus but we all are experiencing the consequences, some more than others.

Peter reminds us that Christ suffered although He had committed no sin! Not only did He suffer but He suffered for you!

This time of national suffering in which we all share, gives us the opportunity to display our endurance and strengthen our faith by following Jesus' example. Many of us live in situations where we are observed by unbelievers. How we respond to the unjustness of our current suffering will speak volumes to them about how faith in Jesus affects how we live.

Now is a time to die to sin and live to righteousness because by Christ's wounds we are healed. The temptation is to grumble and complain. The temptation is to blame leaders in politics and business. May we live gracious lives as we endure suffering.

We, like so many around us, were straying like sheep. Now is the time to return to the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls!

Prayer: O Shepherd and Overseer of our souls, we live in a time of suffering. Thank you that You have suffered for us. Grant us the strength of faith graciously to endure suffering. Help us to overcome the temptation to complain and cast blame during this time of national distress. Bless our leaders with wisdom and skill. Amen.

Saturday

I Am Jesus' Little Lamb Lutheran Service Book 740, Lutheran Worship 517, The Lutheran Hymnal 648



1 I am Je - sus' lit - tle lamb, Ev - er glad at
2 Day by day, at home, a - way, Je - sus is my
3 Who so hap - py as I am, E - ven now the

heart I am; For my Shep - herd gent - ly guides me,
staff and stay. When I hun - ger, Je - sus feeds me,
Shep - herd's lamb? And when my short life is end - ed,

Knows my need and well pro - vides me, Loves me ev - 'ry
In - to pleas - ant pas - tures leads me; When I thirst, He
By His an - gel host at - tend - ed, He shall fold me

day the same, E - ven calls me by my name.
bids me go Where the qui - et wa - ters flow.
to His breast, There with - in His arms to rest.

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L Christ is Risen!

C He is Risen indeed! Alleluia!

L In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C Amen.

L Alleluia. We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. Alleluia.

C Alleluia. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me. Alleluia.

(Romans 6:9; John 10:14)

Gradual

L Christ has risen from the dead.

C God the Father has crowned him with glory and honor,

L He has given him dominion over the works of his hands;

C he has put all things under his feet.

(adapt. from Matt. 28:7; Heb. 2:7; Ps. 8:6)

The picture of Jesus as the Good Shepherd has been precious to the Christian Church throughout the centuries. Some of the earliest depictions of Jesus show Him as the Good Shepherd carrying sheep.

Sometime around the year A.D. 250 this picture of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, was painted on the ceiling of the Catacombs of St. Callixtus in Rome. In fact, The Good Shepherd with a lamb around his shoulders is often found in the frescoes, in the reliefs of the sarcophagi, in the statues and engraved on the tombs.

Also found in a catacomb is the earliest known statue of Jesus. It was completed in about the year A.D. 300. It too shows him as The Good Shepherd with a lamb on His shoulders.



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“I am Jesus little lamb” is a concept that has brought comfort to countless Christians throughout the centuries. It also brings comfort to us in our present time of turmoil.

Indeed, you are part of Jesus’ flock but He also knows your name and cares for you as an individual. No one is unimportant to Jesus. Each one of us is precious in His sight. When we stumble or find ourselves in trouble, the Good Shepherd will even carry us in His arms.

Prayer: O Good Shepherd, thank you for the comfort that You grant to us with your continual care for each individual sheep. Allow us the grace to care for lambs with the same concern shown by the Good Shepherd for the sheep of His flock. Give us special concern for the little ones you have placed in our midst. Amen.

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