

Jesu Juva

“Confidence!”

Text: Psalm 23

(1 John 3:16-24; Acts 4:1-12; John 10:11-18)

Alleluia! Christ is risen! [*He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*] Alleluia!

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

I would like to know when David wrote the 23rd Psalm.

Was it after his confrontation with Goliath? Or maybe after he survived that period of time when King Saul was after him, trying to kill him. Those were certainly times when he *walked through the valley of the shadow of death*.

Or was it after he had committed adultery with Bathsheba, and then murdered her husband in his attempt to cover it up and get away with it, and then when the son born of that tryst died? That was certainly a time when his *soul* needed his Saviour's *restoring* forgiveness, and when he needed to be put back on *the path of righteousness*.

Or was it after he survived the mutiny of his son Absalom against his kingship by fleeing to the land of the Philistines and pretending he had lost his mind? That was a time when the Lord was providing for him, *preparing a table in the presence of his enemies*.

Or maybe it was when Samuel *anointed his head with oil* as king of Israel.

Or maybe it was at the end of his life, when he looked back at all of this and perhaps wondered: *How did I ever survive? I shouldn't be here! Either because of my own sins or the sins of others, I should have been dead long ago! Surely I had a Shepherd all along - even when it didn't seem like it; even when I was being really stupid and sinful. Surely goodness and mercy has followed me all the days of my life.*

Now think back on your life. You probably already have been, as I've been going through David's life. And it really doesn't matter how old or young you are. Think about the sins and stupid things you've done, the dangers you've avoided or survived, the times you've wandered or rebelled. What or who are the Bathshebas, Goliaths, Sauls, and Absaloms in your life? That pepper your past? *Should you even be here? Should you still have the privilege of being a child of God?*

And the scary part of it? We don't even know the half of it! So how good, indeed, to have a Good Shepherd.

David, a shepherd himself, knew something about that and what it meant to be a shepherd. It wasn't an easy job, just sitting on the hillside and soaking up the sun while the sheep grazed. It meant watching out for the young and the old, caring for the rebellious and the tame, finding good pasture and good water, binding up the injured, looking for the lost, and even killing the beasts that came upon his flock, looking for an easy meal (1 Sam 17:34-35).

Yes, David thought, David realized, that is what the Lord was to him. Watching out for him in his youth and in his old age. Giving him the Law when he needed it, when his sin needed confronting; and then giving him the refreshing food and drink of the Gospel, the forgiveness and life he needed. Searching for him and bringing him back when he wandered and rebelled, and caring for him and binding him up when all seemed hopeless and lost. Standing between him and the satanic wolf looking to devour him, and then fighting the Goliath of death for him. So that in the end David could confidently say not only has *goodness and mercy followed me all the days of my life*, but this too: *and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever*.

Now, such confidence might seem foolish when you consider David's life and our lives. How inconsistent we are, how often stupid and foolish, prone to wander into other pastures where the grass seems greener and the sheep look like they're having more fun. How sheepy we often are. Knowing ourselves, maybe we shouldn't be so confident . . .

Or, maybe such confidence seems far away from you and beyond your grasp, when one little word or wrong look from a doctor can make you tremble. When you see what is happening to Christians around the world and to religious freedom in our own country, and you feel timid and weak, like a sheep under attack and without a shepherd. Such confidence, perhaps, seems impossible for you.

And when you look at yourself, at your heart and at your life, that is *exactly* the conclusion you *should* come to. Our hearts do condemn us when held up next to the holiness God requires and desires of us, and so we should not be confident at all.

But listen to what the apostle John told us in the Epistle today: *whenever our heart condemns us*, - as it rightly does - *God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything*. Or in other words, your condemning heart doesn't get the last word; your heart isn't the final authority - God is. The God who knows your heart and knows your fears and knows your inconsistency and failure even better than you - He is your Good Shepherd not because you're holy but because you're not. Not because you can make it on your own but because you can't. Because you need the forgiveness and life that only He can give . . . and *does* give. So that when your heart condemns you, there be another voice that you hear, a greater and trumping word from your Saviour: *Do not be troubled. I forgive you*.

And so, John can continue: ***Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God;*** - and there it is! There is the confidence we need. It's not something we have in ourselves or from ourselves, it's from Him, from His Word through which the Spirit fills us with faith and hope. The faith and hope that then enables us to live in faith toward God and love toward one another. Which enables us, John goes on to say, to ***[keep] his commandments*** - not in order to have Him as our Shepherd but because He is. Keeping them, treasuring them, guarding them, and doing them, because He is keeping and treasuring and guarding and caring for us. For He, our Shepherd, through His Word and life and death, teaches and defines for us what love is, so now instead of being rebellious, we are free to ***[do] what pleases him*** - which is not only doing good for others because we know He is caring and providing for us, but repenting when we don't, and forgiving those who sin against us. And so, John says, ***whatever we ask*** - and what do you think you're going to ask for when God and His Word fill your heart? - ***whatever we ask we receive from Him!*** Forgiveness - done. Love - done. Faith - done.

Done. That's a good word, isn't it? A confidence word. The same confidence that enabled David to be so sure. The same confidence that enabled Peter and John to stand before the Jewish council and speak the truth they didn't want to hear. Because they knew it was *done*. That Jesus' death and resurrection was done and therefore death was done, their sin was done, and satan and hell were done. And even though this world is still a scary place, they knew and believed in that name - ***the only name given among men by which we must be saved***. And were confident. For that name made lame men walk, and would raise them from the dead, if that's what it came to.

And that is the name you know as well, and is our confidence. The name you are baptized into. The name by which you are absolved. The name of your Good Shepherd. Your Good Shepherd who saw the satanic wolf setting upon His flock and ***did not run away like a hired hand***, but who came and stepped in to defend and protect you, letting that wolf sink his teeth into Him instead of you. To fill his belly and howl in delight that he devoured the Shepherd, so there is nothing to stop him from devouring you next. Except that on the third day, as we are celebrating all this season, the wolf received a rude surprise - the Shepherd was alive not dead, and could not die again. His teeth were useless now against the Shepherd, and so the flock He was so looking forward to feasting upon, is safe.

And so you are safe. For ***I am the Good Shepherd***, Jesus says. David's and yours. I know you that you might know me. That you listen to My voice and follow Me, for in My flock, My pasture is the good food you need, the water that refreshes, and safety from the wolf. My pasture is one of forgiveness and life. In My pasture you ***shall not want***.

I will provide what you need and more - your ***cup*** will ***overflow***.

Though the world is still a scary place and the enemy is all around, I *prepare* My *table* right here in the midst of it all - take eat, and take drink, My Body and Blood, the food and forgiveness you need to sustain you.

My *rod and staff*, My Law and Gospel, will keep you, and you need *fear no evil*, not even death. I went through that *valley* and came out alive, and will take you through the same way.

Yes, it's true - My *goodness and mercy shall follow you*, be with you, *all the days of your life*, My child. Even in those times it may not seem like it. And yes, *you shall dwell in My house* forever.

All that, those words of Psalm 23, are the *promises* of God to you. The promises of your Good Shepherd. There are no maybes in that psalm, no conditional statements - just promises. What He *has* done, and what He *will do* for you. And that's your confidence. Not in yourself; in His Word and what He has done. Not in yourself; in His life and death and then back to life for you. Not in yourself; in His faithfulness and consistency. So hear His voice. Follow where He leads. You have a Good Shepherd.

For Christ is risen! [*He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*]  
And you are His lamb.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.