

Lent 4A
Psalm 23

Why Can't You See You Belong To Me?

"The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want ..."

Most likely, we've heard or ritually read the Psalm appointed for today, Psalm 23, at a funeral, and so this Psalm may have a special, personal meaning of its own.

I think that's testimony to the living and dynamic power of God's Word in scripture. Through it God speaks words of comfort and love to us at particular times of our lives. At the same time, we run the risk of making this Word cliché, a ritual, rote reading, almost devoid of meaning, and, instead of comfort, it brings sorrow, memories of sadness and loss. The Psalm becomes for us a "death Psalm."

So it's good to find this Psalm here this morning – the fourth Sunday in Lent. Here the Psalm speaks of God's providence, God's care for us in the *middle* of life, and all along life's journey. When we speak of Lent, we often speak of a journey – following Jesus, to the cross and to the empty tomb; we talk of a 40-day journey where God in Christ Jesus walks us through death to new life. But all along the way – we practice resurrection, each Lord's day, each 1st day of the week. This worship and celebration serves as an Easter oasis on our journey through the barren Lenten wilderness, and reminds us that the gift of eternal life won for us and given to us by Jesus. This real life in abundance begins, not at our death, but at our death and resurrection in baptism.

That's the story the Psalmist weaves through the 23rd Psalm too. In it we sing about God leading us into green pastures with cool, living waters, about the healing power of God's care, the abundance of God's gifts for us, about God's presence, help and comfort in times of danger and trouble. It serves to outline our Lenten journey and remind us of these soul-restoring stops along the way – all of which remind us that we have in Jesus God has made room for us, an eternal dwelling place in God's household.

The Psalm begins with by singing: "The Lord is my Shepherd, I don't need a thing" and ends by confessing that God's goodness and mercy follow after us and we dwell in God's family forever. At beginning and end, the confession is the same – We are God's beloved children, members of God's family; we have a place in God's household, not by any choice of ours, but by God's doing, God's choosing and calling and blessing, by God's mercy and goodness, into forever. In God care, in God's plan for us, there is only life, resurrection – death doesn't make sense anymore. The Psalm speaks of life that's ours because God is our God, because God simply chooses life for you, for us!

Unfortunately, we are blind to it. We can't see. We look to all kinds of other things to give us life or happiness or joy or to keep us alive. We look to all kinds of powers and plans and believe

all sorts of promises. We look here there and everywhere trying to find the place we fit, the place where we are loved, accepted, welcomed, honored. We look, we seek, we search, but it's too dark to see what should be so plain, simple.

It's like so many other love stories we know. All the tension and drama and suffering to find out that one who loves us best, loves us most, loved us first was the one who as there for us and with us and, despite all appearances, was the one who did the things people do when they love. We're just too blind to see that one who loves us most loved us first, before the foundations of the world. We belong to God. We are his people and this one, this good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep, this one is our God. He is ours and we are His. He said so, the day we were baptized. He says so at this table prepared right here in the middle of our ordinary lives with the enemy looking on, unable to harm us anymore. He says so now, face-to-face: I love you. You are mine.

That's when the blind man's eyes are truly opened (John 9); when he finally sees. It's not when Jesus smears mud, not when he washes, but when Jesus finds him and speaks to him and says: "You belong to me."

You belong.

You belong in God's house, in God's family, now and forever. In Jesus name. Amen.