

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

February 26, 2012

The Lord is My Shepherd

FIRST UNITED

METHODIST CHURCH

An Open-Spirited Community of Faith and Action

by Pastor Larry Moffet



The Lord is my Shepherd, I'll not want. Psalm 23:1

Our own Tom Schroeder serves as a volunteer at Lydia Patterson Institute (LPI) in El Paso, Texas. LPI is a United Methodist high school educating 440 students each year. Most would not otherwise go to high school. Many walk across the border to LPI every day, coming from Juarez, Mexico. 90-95% of each graduating class goes on to college. Tom really bonded with students and with faculty while serving two weeks as a volunteer at LPI. He worked in classes and with athletic teams. He went to state championship with the soccer team. The team shaved his head for good luck.

Thursday his mother got a text message from him saying "A teacher here told me I should go into modeling. Knock me down a little bit, I am having a hard time staying humble." Coleen saw the text message and told his mother Lynne to send him a quote from Golda Meir:

"Don't be humble, you're not that great."

Too long we've described Lent as a time to sacrifice things and "get knocked down a little." Instead, Lent is a time for us to open up to what God is doing – through Christ, and through us. Today's Scriptures are clear:

➤ *The Noah story tells us God makes the sacrifice. God makes the covenant not just with Noah, but everybody and every living thing.*

- *I Peter lets us know that every part of Jesus' life, suffering, and death opened up new relationships with all of God's children.*
- *Mark tells us Jesus' baptism and temptation usher in the Good News. This a beautiful thing: true, we are living in the midst of conflict.*

God initiates relationships with us while all these conflicts rage around us and in us. The Good News of salvation is for everyone and everything. Always be ready always to give an account to every one who is asking of you about the hope that is in you, with gentleness and humility.

I Peter 3:15

Some Christians resist talking about Jesus as Savior. Some fear that if we focus on Savior talk we shirk our own ethical responsibilities. We might forget what we can do to live out God's full inclusion of all persons and all things.

All salvation history points to ways God is with us in the conflicts of life. For me – perhaps for you – that understanding is summarized in the phrases of "The Lord is my Shepherd." The next phrase "I shall not want" sounds a little strange to our modern ears. "Want" used to be a word to indicate any kind of need: "With the Lord as my Shepherd, I have all I truly need, no matter what is happening to me."

That's the way Mark tells the Good News: Both God's affirmation and our struggles are a part of Jesus' life. Jesus was fully human and knew temptations, he is even surrounded by wild beasts. As he is baptized, God's voice claims him as God's own child, saying "with you I am well-pleased."

But why did the Spirit *drive* him into the wilderness? The desert is not a gentle place. It is full of dangers. It does not have the things we need to sustain life – water, food and safety.

Swiss theologian, Eduard Schweizer, described how in Jewish tradition the battle with wild animals began with the fall. By withstanding temptations, Jesus ushers in the Peaceable Kingdom foretold by the Jewish prophet Isaiah, the beginning of the time when all of life lives in relationship with God.

With God no one and no thing are excluded. All are a part of the harmony of creation. That is the reason for "The hope that is in us."

The passage in I Peter links Creation, the Noah story, Jesus' death, and all humanity by saying that even when he died Jesus was alive in the Spirit and found all those who had not yet been included in the Good News and brought them into relationship with God." Even hell was included in God's Kingdom. That is why the ancient creeds have that curious phrase, right after "he was crucified, died, and was buried," the creeds say "he descended into hell." No one and no thing, hell or wild beasts, is outside the Kingdom of God! I Peter goes on to say that is why Baptism in Christ is so much more than washing away dirt. It unites us with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

That is a complicated theological concept.

it is summarized with the simple phrases of Psalm 23:

The Lord is my Shepherd, and that means no matter what we face,
(either temptations or wild beasts of life) we have more than enough.

We are surrounded by goodness and nurturing love.

God takes the initiative in restoring our souls to right-relationships.
Even in the valley of struggle, suffering, and death, no evil can claim us,
for You, God, are with me, and with all of us,
guiding and comforting us.

Even if there are enemies around us you prepare a table,
a feast of goodness,

and you don't just let us have a little crumb from the table,
you anoint us, you treat us like royalty. My cup overflows.

Your goodness and mercy find us wherever we are all our lives long,
and that means we live in your home now and eternally.

¹⁰And just as he was coming up out of the water,
he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him.

¹¹And a voice came from heaven,

"You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

¹²And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.

¹³He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan;
and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

¹⁴Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee,
proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵and saying,

**"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near;
repent, and believe in the good news."**

The Lord is my Shepherd. Guiding and nurturing us along the way.
Everything we face, he faced. That is the reason for **"The hope that is in us."**

**Lent is a time to open up space for God to work in us
and in the world.**

**We do that by 3 simple practices in Lent:
we pray, we fast, we give.**

**Those practices tune our hearts to who Christ is
and how Christ works.**

**As we walk with Christ through his struggles,
and share his Good News of new life
we become participants in the Divine Nature.**

We don't have to create salvation, we accept it and share it.

There is Good news and there is the Better News.

The Good News is that there is a Messiah.

The Better News is that that Messiah is not you!

The Lord is our Shepherd.

That is the reason for **"The hope that is in us."**

EPISTLE SCRIPTURE I PETER 3:15-22 *Inclusive Bible*

In your hearts, set Jesus apart as holy and sovereign.

Should anyone ask you the reason for this hope of yours,
be ever ready to reply, but speak gently and respectfully.

¹⁶Keep your conscience clear so that, whenever you are defamed,
those who slander your way of life in Christ may be shamed...

¹⁸The reason Christ died for sins once for everyone—
the just for the sake of the unjust—was in order to lead you to God.
Jesus was put to death in the flesh but was given life in the Spirit.

¹⁹And in the Spirit, Jesus went and preached to the imprisoned spirits.

²⁰They had refused obedience long ago,
while God waited patiently in the days of Noah and the building of the
ark, in which a few persons, eight in all, were brought to safety through
the water. ²¹That water prefigured the water of baptism
through which you are now brought to safety.

Baptism is not the washing away of physical dirt,
but the appeal made to God by a good conscience:
it brings salvation through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,
²²who entered heaven and is now at the right hand of God,
having dominion over angelic authorities and powers.

GOSPEL - MARK 1:9-15 *Please turn to Pew Bible, New Testament, p. 34*

[John proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me;

I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals.

⁸I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”]

⁹In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

¹⁰And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven,

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