

# Servants of Christ

**March 20, 2020**

***The Lord is my shepherd (not toilet paper)***

*Psalm 23*

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

*2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures;*

*He leads me beside the still waters.*

*3 He restores my soul;*

*He leads me in the paths of righteousness*

*For His name's sake.*

*4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,*

*I will fear no evil; For You are with me;*

*Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.*

*5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;*

*You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over.*

*6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me*

*All the days of my life;*

*And I will dwell in the house of the Lord*

*Forever.*

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I have to tell you: I have been looking at everything in my life I have valued and depended upon, and little of it is God. Take toilet paper. Did you know that 75% of people on planet Earth do not even use toilet paper? What does it say about us when we hoard, and thus take from neighbor, in a panic state? We are saying, "I am afraid, I am hurting, I want things to return to normal." There are many unknowns and first time experiences we are facing right now, and we need God as our Shepherd.

Remember life two weeks ago? Are you still getting emails inviting you to a Caribbean vacation and wondering, "Are they for real?" Two weeks ago we had NBA games, a glorious March Madness tournament, and a beloved rodeo. All of our plans changed and no one consulted us.

I am reminded of James 4:13-15

13 Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." 14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. 15 Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."

Ain't that the truth. God knew there would be a Covid-19 virus 1,000 years ago. God is never surprised by anything. God never wakes up and says, "What's going on with Earth today?" But I do believe God works in redemptive ways through all things, including the times we are in. Could it be that part of that redemption is the Church responding in ways that mirror God's love. If you or a co-worker is supremely worried, perhaps we could remember Jesus' words in Matthew 6:25-27 25 "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? 27 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?"

This is not the first plague. Between the years 250AD and 270AD, there was a massive outbreak across the Roman Empire. No hospitals, no modern health care. It could have been measles or small pox, but 5,000 people a day died in Rome alone. The government actually blamed the Church for causing it...? However, while many abandoned the sick, the Christ-followers cared for the sick. I think of our beloved health care workers who need our prayers every day. A decade earlier, another plague broke out and, again, the Christ-followers stayed behind to serve and help.

Psalms 23 does say that God leads us to the calm waters where we can get refreshed. God does lead us to green grass in the desert. But we know life is not always calm waters and cool grass. There are valleys in the landscape, too. There are all kinds of valleys. The valley of sickness, the valley of loneliness, the valley of pain and suffering, the valley of broken dreams or unfulfilled promises, the valley of unemployment, the valley of loss of control, and the valley of the death of someone we love.

Those are valleys we have no control over and yet the events of life seem to slide us into them whether we are willing to go or not.

According to Psalm 23, God is with us in the valley and never leaves us there. He prepares food even though an enemy is on the hill. He guides us to make the best decisions. He comes running after us even though we might be one among a hundred.

But one of my favorite parts is when it says, "You anoint my head with oil." Sheep were often tormented by all kinds of flies and bugs getting in their eyes and on their skin. The Good Shepherd puts oil on the sheep's head so that the flies do not return and the sheep can walk in comfort. That's what God does.

Toilet paper cannot save us. Hand sanitizer helps, but cannot ultimately deliver us. All of the nuclear arsenals in the world can't do anything for us now. There is only one who can deliver in our world of brokenness. And that is the One who is the Good Shepherd, the One who carried all of our afflictions on a cross, and the One who rose from death to lead us into life eternal. I don't know about you, but I wouldn't mind hoarding some Good Shepherd.

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### **Prayer:**

Lord Jesus,

Hear our pleas, our good shepherd and divine physician. We implore your mercy in the wake of an outbreak of serious illness and disease.

Guide our efforts to prevent contagion and make preparations to care for those most vulnerable. Assist all professionals and volunteers who work to eradicate the epidemic now spreading. May our actions be marked by your steadfast love and selfless service and never by panic or fear.

Bestow your comfort and healing to the sick, sustain and strengthen them by your grace. May they know your closeness as they carry the cross of illness. In Christ's Name. Amen.

*Pastor Chris*

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