

My fellow sheep of the Good Shepherd, my brothers and sisters in Christ. The words for our meditation are our Psalm of the Day, Psalm 23.

A Psalm of David: The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

What do you want? I've been asked that question a lot recently. First of all, I'll be graduating from the Seminary in less than a month. So I've been asked what I want in a church, what I want in a location, what I want my ministry to look like. Then my birthday is coming up, so once again I'm asked over and over what I want as a gift. I always have a problem answering that question: What do you want? I may have a particular answer in mind, but I'm never sure that it is the appropriate response. Maybe you're like me and you wrestle with answering that question. Or maybe you are very confident in what you want and have a good answer when someone asks you what you want. Today in our reading, David gives a very interesting answer to that question, "what do you want". As we consider this great Psalm of David, you'll see that **you too can talk like David**. You can talk like him because you lack nothing and because goodness and love follow you.

As we dive into this Davidic psalm, I find it interesting that psalm 23 follows Psalm 22. Now, before you get to be impressed with the education the seminary has provided me by recognizing 23 follows 22, let me explain my interest. Both of these psalms are written by David. Now we don't know when or in what order the HS inspired David to write each of these psalms, but the order that has been passed down to us is very fitting. Psalm 22 speaks of the suffering and victory of the promised Messiah. At the very end of the psalm, at the end of the Messiah's work, we have this beautiful line, "**He has done it**". What proceeds this line of completion? "**The LORD is my Shepherd, I lack nothing.**"

David knew the work that his Messiah would do for him, the work which would be completed in the future lead him to see that he lacked nothing in his life. This lack of want is explained for us in the opening verses of psalm 23. David acknowledges the LORD, the faithful, compassionate, merciful, loving God, was the one who shepherds him. This faithful, compassionate, merciful, loving God has brought him to green pastures and quiet waters. That is, the LORD has brought him to the knowledge of spiritual comfort and peace. In times of spiritual anguish, in weakness, or struggle the LORD refreshes David's soul, his Shepherd is there to restore him, reminding him of God's grace, reminding him of what the Messiah would do for him. His Good Shepherd guides him along right paths. In his grace, David's Shepherd has made him a new and given him the ability to live a God pleasing life. Like a train that is on the track, the LORD has placed David on the right way to go in life.

Now despite what we have read here it may seem to us that it is easy for David to talk about how he lacks nothing, that he doesn't have any wants or desires in this life. After all, we look to Scripture and see that he had a very good track record as a shepherd himself. He was a successful warrior, an accomplished general on the battlefield. He was the blessed king of Israel that would lead his people to an era of prosperity. But nowhere do we see David take pride or consolation in those accomplishments. No, he directly points to where his lack of want comes from. It comes from his Good Shepherd.

On the flip side of things, it can be pretty hard for us to talk like David. In fact it's easy for us to talk the exact opposite. We look at our lives and see countless wants and worries that bombard us day in and day out. We want our work to be good and stress free. We want a calm and peaceful home life. We want to be comfortable financially. We want plenty of food on our tables. We want to be healthy and carefree in this life. We want our Good Shepherd to be showering us with these things. By no means are these things wrong to want, but if we find that these things are lacking does that lead us to wonder why our Good Shepherd is lacking in giving us these things. We perhaps begin to wonder if he is actually good, if we aren't getting the things we want in this life. The devil and our sinful nature definitely love to tell us this.

But when we focus on our earthly wants and what we think we lack, we take our focus off of what is our actual greatest need. These temptations and sinful doubts are a reminder to us of how we are the one who are lacking, that we are lacking spiritually. Because of sin we live in this world where we constantly want and worry. And sometimes the things that we want are not good, are things that we should not desire after. And despite our best efforts, we can't change the sin that brings these wants and worries, nor can we change the sin that dwells in us, that drive us to constantly want, to desire, and to demand from God. It is because of this sin that we stand lacking before God. He wants all people to live in harmony with him and live according to his will. Yet we lack any ability to do this and this lack of any righteousness in ourselves rightfully is deserving of eternal punishment.

Yet in his grace and love for you, your faithful, compassionate, merciful, and loving Good Shepherd filled that need and made up for that which we lacked. Like how David talked in his 22<sup>nd</sup> psalm, we too announced a few weeks ago. At Jesus' resurrection we all got to hear and announce that **He has done it**. Our Good Shepherd rose from the dead declaring that his saving work was accomplished. His work of stepping in where we lacked and fulfilled God's will perfectly was done. His work of willingly laying down his life for you his sheep was done. Through his completed work he has brought you spiritual peace. You have been brought to the comforting pasture of knowing you are at peace with your heavenly Father and are seen as his perfect child like we heard about in 1 John. You now reside by the quiet waters of the knowledge of the peace of eternal life. Through this work he has given you new life. You are now on the path that God sees as pleasing through the blood of Jesus. And each day, though wants and worries may assail you, your Good Shepherd speaks to you through his word, providing nourishment for your soul, he comes to you in his sacraments and there restores your soul to go out once more in faith, knowing that you lack nothing before your God. Because of your Good Shepherd you certainly lack nothing. And as David talks about this in his psalm, you can talk the same way.

As we continue in our psalm we see David now talk about his life ahead of him and the confidence he had. That confidence is on display in these next verses. We see how David talked about how he has no fear because his Good Shepherd was with him, even in the darkest, most dangerous places. He had no fear because his Good Shepherd was there to guide him in his life and protect him with his staff. David also recognized that his Shepherd lavished blessing upon blessing on him. That blessing is described this way **You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.** It was these truths in his life that lead David to talk about how, **Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life.**

Perhaps these statements might not have been as easy for David to say. After all, we look to times in his life where it seemed like God's goodness and love were absent. We look at when he was on the run for his life from King Saul and the Israelite army. We saw how David brought shame on himself with his sins of adultery, murder, and deception. We read about this horrible family struggles he experienced with his son, Absalom. Yet, because of who his Good Shepherd was and because he knew his Shepherd's promises David could confidently talk about how goodness and love followed him.

Again, it is probably hard for to talk or want to talk the way David does in his psalm. Experiences, events, and people in our lives might lead us away from talking about goodness and love. We experience suffering, we feel the pain of living in a sinful life, we are at the mercy of diseases and death, we struggle with poverty and persecution. The devil, the world, and our sinful nature rage at us to deny that God follows us with his goodness and love.

But despite what the rest of the world might say, in faith you talk differently, you talk like David. You talk as one who knows their Shepherd guides you in your daily life and protects you with his staff. You talk, recognizing how you are blessed. You talk with thanks because, while the world and devil may whisper contradictions in your ear, even though you may not have a banquet at your table or your glass may be less than half full, you look around and see how your Good Shepherd has anointed you with countless spiritual and physical gifts.

You can talk this way, like David because God's goodness and love do follow you. And what is so amazing is that the way David talks about this is much stronger. For really David says that God's goodness and love pursue. They chase. It's like God is hunting people down to give his goodness and love. And that is what he does for you as well. In our gospel you heard how your Good Shepherd knows you. He knows you personally. He knows you personally. He knows what you need. He knows how to take care of you. Your Shepherd is with. Even during the days when it feels like you are walking through that valley, there he is right beside guiding you in the way you should go, protecting you along the way. And your Good Shepherd gives the strength and the ability to talk like this. While we wait to enter the house of the LORD forever, he gives you his house here. And how blessed we to be able to return to this house every week. Here in his house you hear his Word of guidance. Here he offers you his words of comfort. Here he reminds you of how he has done it. Here he tells you how he has, does, and will bless you. Here he reminds you of how you can talk like David.

What do you want? Now we can answer that in a way that fits the context of what is being asked,. But today I hope you remember how you can answer that question in faith. When faced with this question you can talk like David. You can talk like him because you know your Good Shepherd has made you to lack nothing. You can talk like him because you know your Good Shepherd daily pursues you with his goodness and love. The question is before you. You got the answer to the question. So start talking. Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.