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*As we unite in worship today, we extend a warm welcome to each one present.*

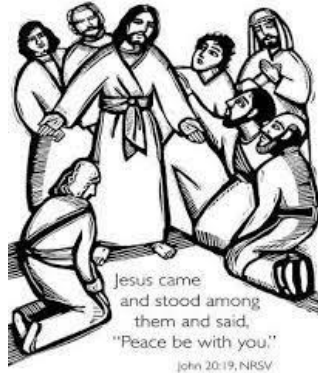
*May we together experience the presence of God.*

*\* - You are invited to stand at these times... if you are able*

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## **We Gather to Prepare Our Hearts to Meet Our Lord**

### **Prelude ANNOUNCEMENTS**



### **Opening Meditation**

Everyone has experience with suffering. Even though we struggle to talk about suffering because we often do that comparison thing and decide that our suffering isn't as bad (or maybe is worse than) other people and, therefore, we feel guilty thinking about it, or even naming what we feel as suffering. But our pain is our pain. And it is real, and it shapes who we are and how we respond to the world.

How we live with suffering and how we acknowledge God's presence in our suffering is what makes us able to endure. There is a presence, a guardian of the soul, that gives us hope. That presence is one who is familiar with suffering. This one walks with us into the suffering. This guardian is a close companion, not one who waits until we make it through on our own and then gives us a gold star or some other commendation. No, this one is right there with us. This one knows us. This guardian cares for us. This is why in addition to being the guardian of our souls, Jesus is the shepherd.

We understand shepherd, even though most of us are somewhat removed from the shepherding business. We're familiar with that image, though. We've heard sermons and seen images of Jesus as the shepherd. We get it. And in large part, we get it because of a guy named David.

You know David, the Old Testament guy, king of Israel, war hero, builder of palaces, writer of psalms. A lot of

psalms get attributed to David. The truth is, we don't really know how many or which ones were actually written by David and which ones were just attributed to him - meaning someone else put his name on them to get them published!

But I like to think that this one, our text for this week, was one that David wrote—something he plucked out on a lazy afternoon as he looked after the sheep. It was just a little ditty that he couldn't even get his brothers to listen to when he got back to the homestead that evening.

And he starts to sing.

*The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I 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 goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.*

Well, that's how I imagine it anyway. How could he know those six verses would become the single most remembered part of scripture around the world? But maybe he sensed it even as he wrote it. Or as it came to him in that curious process called inspiration. In-spirit-ed. A human/divine encounter that left us with six verses that speak to deep places in our souls. A psalm about wanting; or wanting and having. Or having so much, being so filled, that wanting doesn't even enter the picture anymore.

In the meantime, we want. And because we live in a world of amazing resources, we can be convinced that this thing or that can fill that aching need. And if we just had one of those; if we just looked like her, or drove a car like him, or dressed like those folks, then our wanting would be done. Except it isn't. The fixes that the world offer are always short term. They might last a while, but then we need to upgrade. Then we need the next new thing. Or then we discover that the features of our current thing don't include satisfaction or contentment despite the advertising telling us otherwise.

Our solution, we think, is to settle. Settle for less. Be satisfied being half empty. Be content with a vacancy in significant places. Learn to live with what is. Good enough is good enough. But that's not what the Twenty-Third Psalm says either. It talks of banquet tables; it talks of overflowing cups; it talks of peace and of being pursued by goodness and mercy. It talks about not wanting, not because you've trained yourself not to want, but because you are filled up to the top and spilling over.

Yes, some of it is learning to want properly. But mostly, it is being so filled up with love and support and care that you can't imagine what could possibly be better than that.

## **CALL TO WORSHIP**

(from a Native American interpretation of Psalm 23)

The GREAT FATHER above a SHEPHERD CHIEF is.

**I am His and with Him I want not.**

He throws out to me a rope,  
and the name of the rope is love  
and He draws me to where the grass is green

**and the water is not dangerous,  
and I eat and lie down and am satisfied.**

Sometimes my heart is very weak and falls down  
but He lifts me up again and draws me into a good road.

**His name is WONDERFUL.**

Some time, it may be very soon, it may be a long, long time,  
He will draw me into a valley.

**It is dark there, but I'll be afraid not,  
for it is between those mountains  
that the SHEPHERD CHIEF will meet me  
and the hunger that I have in my heart all through life will be satisfied.**

Sometimes he makes the love rope into a whip,  
**but afterwards, He gives a staff to lean upon.**

He spreads a table before me with all kinds of foods.

**He puts His hand upon my head and all the "tired" is gone.**

My cup he fills till it runs over.

**What I tell is true.**

**I lie not.**

These roads that are "away ahead" will stay with me  
through this life and after;

**and afterwards, I will go to live in the Big Teepee  
and sit down with the SHEPHERD CHIEF forever. Amen.**

## **PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

**Gentle Shepherd, You guide us in right paths, You lead us in the ways of righteousness, but we have allowed our anger, our rage, our greed, and at times even hate, to direct our paths. We have overreacted, we have taken more than our share, we have despised others that seem to have it all. Forgive us, God, for not following Your ways. Forgive us for not remembering that we are Your sheep, and You are our Shepherd.**

**Forgive us when we have not listened for Your voice and instead have acted in the ways of the world. Guide us back to Your path, to loving You and loving our neighbors. Help us to unclench our fists and lend out our hands in hope and healing, forgiveness and love. In the name of Christ our Shepherd, we pray. Amen.**

### **ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The Good Shepherd knows the sheep, and the Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep so that the sheep may live. We are part of the flock, we are part of Christ's body. In Christ, we find wholeness and restoration. Go forth and share this Good News. Amen.

### **\*Praise Hymn UMH #128 "He Leadeth Me: O Blessed Thought" (verses 1-3)**

Author: Joseph H. Gilmore (1862)

Composer: William B. Bradbury (1864)

#### **1. He leadeth me: O blessed thought!**

**O words with heavenly comfort fraught!  
Whate'er I do, where'er I be,  
still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me.**

#### **Refrain:**

**He leadeth me, he leadeth me,  
by his own hand he leadeth me;  
his faithful follower I would be,  
for by his hand he leadeth me.**

**2. Sometimes mid scenes of deepest gloom,  
sometimes where Eden's bowers bloom,  
by waters still, o'er troubled sea,  
still 'tis his hand that leadeth me. [Refrain]**

**3. Lord, I would place my hand in thine,  
nor ever murmur nor repine;  
content, whatever lot I see,  
since 'tis my God that leadeth me. [Refrain]**

### **We Hear God's Word**

**Gospel Lesson..... John 10:1-10 (NRSV)**

#### ***Jesus the Good Shepherd***

*10 "Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. 2 The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5 They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers." 6 Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.*

*7 So again Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. 8 All who came before me[a] are thieves and bandits, but the sheep did not listen to them. 9 I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved*

*and will come in and go out and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.*

Word of God for the People of God! **Thanks be to God!**

## **Children's Sermon**

### **\*Faith Hymn UMH #381 "Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us" (verses 1-3)**

*Author (attributed to): Dorothy A. Thrupp (1836)*

*Composer: William B. Bradbury (1859)*

**1. Savior, like a shepherd lead us,  
much we need thy tender care;  
in thy pleasant pastures feed us,  
for our use thy folds prepare.  
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!  
Thou hast bought us, thine we are.  
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!  
Thou hast bought us, thine we are.**

**2. We are thine, thou dost befriend us,  
be the guardian of our way;  
keep thy flock, from sin defend us,  
seek us when we go astray.  
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!  
Hear, O hear us when we pray.  
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!  
Hear, O hear us when we pray.**

**3. Thou hast promised to receive us,  
poor and sinful though we be;  
thou hast mercy to relieve us,  
grace to cleanse and power to free.  
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!  
We will early turn to thee.  
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!  
We will early turn to thee.**

**\*\*Meditation\*\***

## **We Respond to God's Word with Thanksgiving**

### **Prayers of the People –Lord's Prayer**

Jesus, you are the shepherd of us all. I pray that those who need you in this moment would not be found lacking. You lead them to calm waters, infusing them with new strength. You guide them on the path of justice for the sake of your name.

Although they pass through difficult and dark trials caused by evil forces, may they not be afraid because you are at their side and with them.

It is you who supplies all their needs, laying out a banquet for them, even when surrounded by their enemies, anointing them, continuing to fill them with your Holy Spirit so that they can know that your kindness and love follow them all the days of their lives, and in the house of Jehovah the Lord, they will live every day now and forever **uniting** in the prayer you taught us to pray, Our Father...

### **Offertory (UM Hymnal 95) Wykoff**

*Caring and compassionate God, we feel like we have been through so much. Battered by division, perceived by some as too judgmental and by others as too accommodating, and we know our witness to the world has suffered. Bless the gifts we give and help them to be used to sow seeds of kindness, healing, hope, and justice. When we as a church falter, remind us that Christ, our Good Shepherd, never falters. In Christ, we pray. Amen.*

## **We Go Forth To Serve God and Our Neighbors**

### **\*Departing Hymn UMH #557**

*Author: John Fawcett (1782)*

*Composer: Johann G. Nægeli*

### **"Best Be the Tie That Binds" (verses 1-3)**

**1. Blest be the tie that binds  
our hearts in Christian love;  
the fellowship of kindred minds  
is like to that above.**

**2. Before our Father's throne  
we pour our ardent prayers;  
our fears, our hopes, our aims are one,**

**our comforts and our cares.**

**3. We share each other's woes,  
our mutual burdens bear;  
and often for each other flows  
the sympathizing tear.**

### **BENEDICTION**

Remember this: the world will tell you the best response to suffering is to turn away. Yet the Guardian of our souls came near to our suffering and calls us to do the same. As you leave this place, how will you be a healing companion with your neighbors who are suffering, isolated, and struggling? May you go in peace to bring peace to all you meet. Amen.

**\*Postlude\***