

Devotion for Pentecost 8

Psalm 23

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 paths of righteousness for His name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, 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 forever.

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen*

Ephesians 2:1-22

God is creating a new humanity in Christ Jesus

What word would describe our natural spiritual condition apart from Christ?
What motivates God to make us alive to Himself in Christ?
What is God's ultimate purpose for the Church in Christ?

Mark 6:30-44

Jesus feeds the multitude

What Old Testament event does this remind us of?
Jesus taught the people before feeding them. Why is this order significant?
How does Jesus continue to feed us with bread from heaven?

“PRAY OR PREY”

How do you pray? A correctional chaplain once observed, that some people pray for others and some people prey on others. One of St. Paul's great concerns expressed in the book of Acts as he said farewell to the Ephesian Church and in other of his letters, is that believers be on guard against those whom we would call 'wolves in sheep's clothing.' These would be people who use their position or influence in the church to better themselves or advance their own agenda rather than promoting the agenda of God, who in Christ is creating a new humanity by calling people to faith and making them alive in Him.

There have always been spiritual predators in the church. They can be difficult to spot. They don't advertise themselves as predators. Fine spiritual men came to the churches of Galatia on the heels of Paul, who had taught them the gospel of God's grace received as a free gift through faith in Christ Jesus. These pious, kind men agreed with Paul, except for one thing! They said he forgot to mention that our salvation also depends on keeping the Old Testament ceremonial laws. It sounded fine to the sheep at Galatia. It makes sense that our salvation should depend in some way on our good works.

The wool had been pulled over their eyes, until Paul told them that this teaching, which sounded so sensible, completely undermined the gospel and made Christ of no value. For, "*all who rely on works of the law are under a curse.*" The law must be kept perfectly and even the most minor transgression brings guilt and wrath. It is by grace that we are saved through faith in Christ Jesus. As Paul said, "*It is not your own doing; It is the gift of God, not a result of works.*" In time and for eternity, we are God's workmanship in Christ!

These nice men, who presented themselves as shepherds of the Lord's flock, were in fact wolves in sheep's clothing. They were wolves, because they led the sheep away from Jesus, in whom we have forgiveness and through whom we receive grace as a free gift. Even as sheep in the field need to listen for the voice of the shepherd, we need to listen for our Shepherd's voice in the scriptures and through the words of shepherds who instruct us in the truth of scripture and lead us to Christ Jesus and the forgiveness of his cross. We pray the Lord to protect us from people who would prey upon us, whether in body or in spirit. We pray the Lord to bless us with ears to recognize His voice in the gospel and with hearts that respond to His call.

“I AM TRUSTING THEE, LORD JESUS”

(Public Domain)

**I am trusting Thee, Lord Jesus. Trusting only Thee;
Trusting Thee for full salvation, great and free.**

**I am trusting Thee for pardon, at Thy feet I bow,
for Thy grace and tender mercy, trusting now.**

**I am trusting Thee for cleansing in the crimson flood;
Trusting Thee to make me holy by Thy blood.**

**I am trusting Thee to guide me; Thou alone shalt lead,
every day and hour supplying, all my need.**

**I am trusting Thee for power; Thin can never fail.
Words which Thou Thyself shalt give me must prevail.**

**I am trusting Thee, Lord Jesus; Never let me fall.
I am trusting Thee forever and for all.**

PRAYER

Gracious God, we give thanks as we contemplate the depth and magnitude of your love in Christ Jesus. We are by nature children of wrath, but in Christ you made us your beloved children. When we were dead to you in spirit and completely alienated from you in our thoughts, words and actions, you opened our hearts to the gospel and through your Spirit, made us alive to you in Christ. We thank you for the continued blessing of your forgiveness. We pray that you enable us to overcome the weakness of our sinful nature, believe more fully and follow in Christ more faithfully. In Jesus' name. Amen

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father who art in heaven. Hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, Forever and ever. Amen

THE CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen

BENEDICTION

Ephesians 2:19

“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.”

Bible Knowledge Quiz

What are the names of the cities of the seven churches of Revelation?

What is the name of the city in which Paul saw a light and was converted?

What city did Abraham leave when God called him to go to the promised land?

Answers to Last Week's Quiz

Herodias (Mark 6:17-25).

Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus (Luke 10:38-42).

Mary Magdalene (Luke 8:1-2).