

Date: October 27, 2024

Texts: Psalm 23. 3 / John 10. 7-10

Title: "Restored and Led"

### Intro -

re: Grandpa and the scouring of flea markets in Western NY - searching for  
treasures (in need of a little restoration...) -  
which he was superbly able and willing to do...

cf. - per the chair...

I originally thought he made them, but was then corrected by my Dad  
that Grandpa bought them in rough shape... took them apart...  
carefully cleaned up... restored... and put back together  
linseed oil was his favored technique - for bringing back the beauty  
originally found in the wood...

and then - he taught himself the skills need to cane them, and -  
~ Voila! ~

along with the quilts that were hand stitched by my great-aunts,  
I grew up with some really cool, hand-crafted (yet  
everyday) - goods...

and now - after we've used them (quite a lot...) -

some of them stand in need of a little more restoration...

what Grandpa had so lovingly accomplished...

what we had so blithely used...

is now a little scratched... a little loose...

a little worn... and maybe even - a touch broken

which - in today's disposable culture - means we might just  
throw it out

but not these chairs... not those quilts...

they are treasured...

they are worth something (not in monetary terms, but because of  
what they are.... because of whose hands wrought them...)

relate - sometimes...

we might find ourselves in that same condition -  
in need of restoration

and it's nice to know that -

we are equally valued... maybe even -  
more greatly treasured  
by the God who can "restore our souls..."

## **I) Restored**

note - there is a bit of an idealistic paradox here -

in that - if the shepherd cares for us...  
if our God loves and looks after us...  
- how can we be in need of restoration?

how is that he did not prevent the wear and tear  
from damaging us...  
from doing harm to our souls?

and yet...

we know this is sometimes the case...

this may even be the case for some of us right now

sometimes...

it's because of choices we made...

sometimes...

it's because of things outside of our control -  
things that "just happen..."

no matter -

we are where we are... and -

we need a "restoration work" in our lives...  
in our soul...

cf. - Keller makes an analogy with sheep, particularly as it connects with  
another Psalm of David (42.11) where he cries out:

"Why are you cast down, O my soul... —

— ... and why are you so disquieted within me...?”

he draws an exact parallel to this and caring for sheep -

especially... sheep that are “cast...”

sheep that have been “cast down...”

which is a shepherd’s term for when a sheep has turned over on  
its back, and cannot get back up by itself

(and - does not have a pendant to call for help...)

cf. - we might envision this as slightly silly looking:

the sheep on its back... little legs moving about in frustration...

but the reality is this - a cast sheep will die...

... if it is not “restored”

a cast sheep is vulnerable to predators...

a cast sheep experiences life-threatening internal conditions...

a cast sheep can do nothing to correct the situation on its own

it typically happens like this -

a sheep will lie down in a little hollow or depression...

it may stretch and roll on its side, wherein the center of gravity  
shifts, and it turns onto its back

- and, it can’t turn itself back over

a picture that might also help us with Jesus’ parable of the lost sheep

wherein the shepherd leaves the 99 to find the one...

and when he finds it, he lifts it up and restores it

relate - it is a sad truth that many people have an image of God

that goes like this:

he is all loving at first, but then - if we stumble or fall -

he gets frustrated with us... fed-up with us...

and walks away from us...

cf. - by way of contrast -

we are given this picture... this image...

this promise of a shepherd who cares for his sheep...  
a shepherd who searches for his sheep...  
    a shepherd who lifts up and restores his sheep

do you need to be restored today...?

    do you know that this is God's heart desire for you...?

    do you accept that this is God's offer to you...

        God's gift to you...?

cf. - your soul is precious to God, and -

    worth the time, effort, and sacrifice its restoration requires

- maybe take a moment (or - longer...) this week and look -  
    really look -

        at what stains and scratches God is

            lovingly undoing...

        at what God is doing to bring restoration to your soul

## **II) Led**

cf. - one of the gifts God offers us in this regard is this:

    the gift of "leading us..."

and - if we look at the "not so secret lives of sheep" -

    well see why this matters

    note - sheep are notorious creatures of habit

        if left to themselves, they will follow the same trails

            until they become ruts... graze the same hills until they

                turn to desert wastes... pollute their own ground

                    until it is corrupt with parasites and disease...

    no other class of livestock needs more careful handling...

        more detailed direction...

            than do sheep

here - we celebrate that the sheep have a shepherd who leads them in -

“paths of righteousness for his name’s sake...”

now... if “paths of righteousness” were the habits we kept, well...

no problems, right?

but - for those of us who might be creatures of habit...

even if just heard and there...

not even really worth speaking about...

mostly harmless... innocuous...

and - just everyone else...

- for those of us who might fall into this description -

are those habits best described as leading us

in paths of righteousness, or -

are they habits that maybe...

lead us elsewhere?

or - have no reason for being (a habit - in our lives...)

relate - One day a young girl watched her mother prepare a ham for baking.

At one point, the daughter asked, "Mom, why did you cut off both ends of the ham?" "Well, because my mother always did," said the mother.

“But why...?”

"I don't know -- let's go ask Grandma."

So they went to Grandma's house and asked,

"Grandma, when you prepared the ham for baking, you always cut off both ends -- why did you do that?"

"My mother always did it," said Grandma.

“But why...?”

"I don't know -- let's go ask Great-Grandma." So off they went...

- "Great-Grandma, when you prepared the ham for baking, you always cut off both ends -- why did you do that?"

"Well," Great-Grandma said, "the pan was too small."

cf. - not the most “life-altering” of habits, but...

why do you follow the paths you follow...?  
... where do they lead you?

cf. - in the Bible: the idea of righteousness is almost always about  
being in a right relationship with God, and -  
being in a right relationship with our fellow human beings

- this is the path on which God would lead us...  
and the actions that lead us on this path -  
are the habits we should and could develop

so...

what does it mean to be right with God...?  
what does it mean to be right with your neighbor...?

relate - if we think of this as a path to follow (a helpful image...), and -  
if we accept that we need to be led on this path  
(as is the case with sheep... and the shepherd...)  
then we might do well to consider what Jesus had to say  
about following him:

“If anyone would follow me, let that man... let that woman...  
deny him or herself (daily...) -  
take up their cross...  
and - follow...”

which - truth be told - most don't want to do  
(especially when it is spelled out in these terms...)

note - Jesus never made light of the cost... the challenge...  
the difficulty... of following him...  
of being led by him...

but - he was also clear about the blessings...  
about the joy...

about the satisfaction that comes from having a sense of purpose...

- all of which more than make up for the cost...
- all of which make it the only choice that can  
bring us peace

and what it “looks like” begins with this:

- it is a deliberate act of will  
we must decide that this is right for us  
(note - as with the sheep, the alternatives are  
particularly wonderful, so...  
this should not be a hard decision...)
- it means that instead of insisting on my rights...  
I am willing to forego them in favor of others  
... and - when we are willing to do this - we find ourselves  
on new ground with God, our Shepherd
- it leads us to a place where we have let go of pride, and ...  
find ourself set free of the harm that others can try and  
inflict on us, and instead - enjoy a feeling of  
contentment... peace... and well-being that comes from  
knowing your Shepherd cares -  
and that is all that really matters...
- it shows itself in an approach to life that moves away from  
insisting on and asserting my own will, and instead -  
learning to cooperate with what my Shepherd wishes...  
complying with his will and direction and guidance...

because...

this is how sheep... this is how we...  
are led to the blessings God has for us