

Date: Nov. 24, 2024

Title: "A Forever Home"

Texts: Psalm 23. 6 / John 10. 11-18

Intro -

re: HS Yth Grp - parents were in charge of it, along g with next door neighbors...

i.e. - felt some obligation to attend, especially when held at our house
and included dinner...

on a retreat, where presumably I had a little more flexibility, but -

I had a bunch of buddies along, and - one particular girl
whom I was interested in...

well - I was there... I was "all in..."

and - it turned out to be a life-changing weekend...

in terms of my faith... my understanding and embrace of
what it was that God could mean in my life

not necessarily a singular, punctiliar, "aha!" moment...

(as some might look back on, but - everyone is different...
some - more so...)

rather - it was a beginning...

wherein my faith was connected to...

found its footing in...

this affirmation of the psalmist

- we were challenged to look back on our lives and consider:

what were the "coincidences" that we assumed... and -

might they rather be times when God was present...

God was at work...?

how might we look back and see that the goodness and

mercy of God had indeed followed us -

all our days...?

have you ever paused to reflect on this... - on how God's blessing...

have been chasing you down the road of your life?

let's spend a little time doing this together...
as we conclude this look at the 23rd Psalm

I) Surely...

and it starts with this sense of "surety..."

- Surely... goodness and love follow me...
no doubt about it...

cf. - throughout this series... throughout this psalm...

emphasis has been found in the care exercised by the
attentive shepherd -
the entire welfare of the flock is due to the shepherd's
diligent effort and labors
all the benefits enjoyed by the sheep depend on this
and - is summed up in this one simple statement:
surely... goodness and love follow me...

cf. - a bold statement...

and - somewhat of a boast - a declaration of confidence
in the one who watches over us

which is (again...) easy to say when things are going well

what about when my body breaks down... when I stand by
loved ones who are suffering... when I struggle to
pay the bills... when my children vex me...?

- what about then...?

because... these are the sort of times that test a person's confidence
in the care of Christ

Keller observes - about his own experiences, but in a way that I think
resonates with us all -

"With my limited understanding as a finite human being, I could not
always comprehend [what God was doing in the midst of these times].

With my natural tendencies to fear, worry, and ask "why?" - it was
not always simple to assume that He really did know ... -

- ... what He was doing with me. There were times I was tempted to panic and bolt from His care [with] the strange... notion that I could survive better on my own.”

but - he asserts - God never gave up on him...

God followed him in goodness and in love...

God would always pick him up and bring him back -
in great tenderness and mercy

- this is the foundation that enables him -
as it enables us -

to get through life's ups and downs

Keller writes:

“My assurance is lodged in these aspects of His character...

My serenity has as its basis an implicit, unshakable reliance on

His ability to do the right thing, the best thing, in any
given situation.”

cf. - can we say the same...?

but more than that -

can we offer the same?

i.e. - is this outflow of goodness and love for me to stop and
stagnate in my life?

or - is there a way in which it can pass on through me to benefit others?

... a way in which goodness and love follow after me...

wherever I go...

for the well-being... the blessing... of others?

Keller notes that while mismanaged sheep can ruin and ravage

land almost beyond repair...

- they can (if properly managed) be the most beneficial
of all livestock

and - while I would greatly love to head off on a tangent here -

it's all because their manure...

is the best balanced of any produced by domestic stock
(ah... the possibilities...)

but -

let's simply acknowledge the benefits to the land...
of a well-tended flock of sheep - in terms of what they eat...
in terms of what they leave behind...

in ancient literature, sheep are referred to as "those of the
golden hooves" - an indication of how highly esteemed
they were for their beneficial effect on the land...

is this true of my life...?

do I leave blessings and benedictions behind...?

do I leave behind peace in the lives of others...?

do I leave behind forgiveness...?

do I leave behind contentment...?

do I leave behind love, and joy...?

the shepherd cares for us...
so that we can...

II) I Will Dwell...

... the shepherd cares for us...

so that we can do all that, and - more...

in a confidence that can never be shaken

"The Lord is my shepherd" - the joyous statement with which
this psalm began

"And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever"

- the comforting affirmation that closes it out

re: the sheep -

here, they are so utterly satisfied with their lot in life...

so fully contented with the care they receive...

so much "at home" with the shepherd... -

that there is not a shred of a desire for any change

relate - helpful to realize here that what is referred to by “house”

is the family... or household... or flock of God

- a promise of a forever home...

where we are surrounded by a family formed in love

Keller again draws our attention to how this might play out with sheep:

- so deeply satisfied with it's lot in life, that it has no desire
to change - whatsoever...

it's as if it's standing at the fence... bragging to its (possibly)

less fortunate neighbors on the other side... boasting of

the wonderful year it has had... and -

its complete confidence in its owner

- do we feel the same pride in belonging to Christ...?

- how glad are we to look back and recall all the ways He has provided
for our welfare...?

- do we delight to describe - in detail - the hard experiences through which
Christ has brought us (safely home...)?

- do we ever speak of our confidence in Christ...?

i.e. - by the contentment and serenity of our lives...

we should show what a distinct advantage it is

to be a member of the Shepherd's household... the Shepherd's flock...

a standing that is forever...

a “belonging...” that can never be lost...

because the one to whom we belong -

stands with us... forever

we will dwell not just in his house, but -

in his presence

- cf. - re: we know the importance of “presence” from the earliest age...
up until our final breath
- there’s the cry of an infant for his or her Mommy...
 - there’s coming home from an evening out and finding the baby-sitter collapsed... asleep on your daughter’s bed (because your daughter wouldn’t let her go...)
 - there’s the warm feeling that envelopes you as you drive home from college for Thanksgiving Break - from your first time away from home...
 - there’s the gathering at bedside around an aged parent - together with your siblings, because - you find strength and peace from one another - such as you can’t find on your own...
 - there’s the gathering together again - in the presence of loved ones to bid that final farewell (and - maybe - to take a trip or two down memory lane...)

in all this - and more - we know... deeply... intimately... in a way that
can be duplicated nowhere else -

what it means to dwell in those of...

to dwell in the presence of...

the Lord

the Lord who is our Shepherd...

the Lord who does provide...

the Lord who invites us to his table...

the Lord - who will stand by us - forever.