

April 21, 2024

Fourth Sunday of Easter

John 10:11-18

The Psalm we read this morning is Psalm 23. The most famous and recalled Psalm by most people. This is the one everyone remembers.

We often think that it has a connection with the Gospel this morning because it mentions shepherds. It does, but like most things in

scripture there are deeper meanings. I found this one very interesting and I hope you will as well.

In Psalm 23 it talks about the valley of the shadow of death. Some have thought that this was an actual place on a map. A feature of

geography. Some Rabbi's have said that it is not. There is a deeper

meaning to that phrase in Psalm 23. Things now start to get interesting!

Rabbi's have said that the valley of the shadow of death is that space in childbirth from the womb to being born into this world. In short the valley of the shadow of death is the birth canal. Many things can happen in childbirth and not all are successful. So, traumatic is childbirth that the soul does not remember its life in the womb.

In Psalm 23 David is remembering being born. During this traumatic event he realizes that God is with him. David is not abandoned by God during this process. God is with him at his birth and present throughout his entire life.

In John's Gospel he draws God's presence and love into the telling of this story. The mutual love between the Father and the Son is being mirrored in the relationship between the shepherd and His sheep. This relationship is further defined as one of love. This love will be linked to keeping God's commandments. Out of love for His sheep the shepherd

will lay down His life for His sheep. This is repeated three times to stress its importance. He lays it down in order to take it up. He lays it down on His own accord. He has the authority to lay it down and the authority to take it up.

This is all framed in the context of God's love and God's commandments. Jesus's death and resurrection are drawn into the relationship between the Son and God. The laying down of the Good Shepherd's life is an expression of love and faithfulness to His sheep. It is also an expression of love between God the Father and His Son.

Jesus's sheep are drawn into the love and faithfulness that is shared between Jesus and God the Father. In the next few weeks Jesus will pray that we will continue to abide in that love. We will hear about it for two weeks and the important word is abide. Keep in mind that God does not abandon us and that His love for us endures forever. David testifies to that in Psalm 23. Jesus testifies to that in the story of the Good Shepherd. There is an assurance that we have been drawn into

God's love from the time God formed us in our mother's womb and brought us into the light of this world. Live in that love. Knowing full well that nothing can snatch you out of god's hand. Not even a wolf.

Jesus spent a lot of time teaching and educating His disciples. I often wonder if the story of the Good Shepherd is and expansion on Psalm 23 and the passage in Isaiah about the shepherd. It would certainly open up the Old Testament scriptures. The Good Shepherd story is an expansion on how we understand God's love for us. I did not get that in Psalm 23 with the valley of death phrase. Yet when I read the Rabbi's interpretation it opened up a whole new understanding and a richer concept of the idea of God's love for us. I hope you found this interesting as I did.

God bless and stay in God's love, Pasto