

**34C*THE TIMELESS PSALMS:
A CALL TO WORSHIP
EASTER 4C 2016
PSALM 23**

We come to worship and give thanks to the Lord our Guarding Shepherd.
We come, because God quietens our fears and blesses us with a purpose.

We come to sing our praises to the Lord who gives us strength after rest.
We go, knowing that God sends us out again into 'life', after our times of rest.

We come to honour and revere the Lord, our Compassionate Shepherd, who blesses us by carrying us over the rough paths in the dark valley of suffering.
**We give thanks, that we are blessed with a feast of God's overflowing grace—
as together with our Good and Guiding Shepherd, we face life's hostile threats. Amen.**

PSALM 23
A psalm of David.

1 The LORD is my shepherd;
I have all that I need.

2 He lets me rest in green meadows;
he leads me beside peaceful streams.

3 He renews my strength.
He guides me along right paths,
bringing honour to his name.

4 Even when I walk
through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid,
for you are close beside me.
Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me.

5 You prepare a feast for me
in the presence of my enemies.
You honour me by anointing my head with oil.
My cup overflows with blessings.

6 Surely your goodness and unfailing love
will pursue me all the days of my life,
and I will live in the house of the LORD forever.

**PRAYERS OF TRUST & THANKFULNESS:
EASTER 4C 2016
PSALM 23**

Today, we come to worship and give thanks to the Lord who is our Guarding and Guiding Shepherd; who grants us the blessings of having time out to rest and be restored after a hard journey through life's rugged places. We also give thanks that we worship a God who understands that we are people who are often doubting and even fearful about the risks involved in travelling along the path in life we are called to tread. We acknowledge that there are times when we are so weary and over-stretched, that we cannot function as we would like; and that in our distress and malnourishment, our God guides us to rest within the shelter of God's holy presence; where we are nurtured and renewed in our trust and hope in the God who is our Shepherd; whose strength empowers us—and so we sing praises and offer our thankful prayers to our Shepherding God.

Supportive God, we give thanks that you walk with us, even ahead of us as we travel the difficult paths of life. We give thanks for the balance you gift us in life, with our good and contented times; along with those times of struggling to deal with all that confronts us. We especially give thanks for God's blessings on us in times of distress, turmoil, anxiety, grief and loss. We are indeed blessed when God carries us gently over the very rough times of life; when we are so diminished of our usual hope, courage and strength, that we are incapable of dealing with all that challenges our faith and trust in God. Compassionate God, we come to you in trust and hope, as you are our Guiding Shepherd in all of life.

God of grace and God of generosity, we give thanks for the feasts of gracious generosity that you spread before us, when we were only expecting to receive crumbs! We give thanks for the healing balm of your love that refreshes and renews us, when we were only expecting more bumps and bruises! We give you thanks for the beauty and strength with which you surround our daily lives, when often we expect only ugliness, temptation and endless struggle. Today, we join in celebrating the wonders of our God that come to us as encouragements and support when we are most in need of those gifts, and we give thanks that we often find these as we worship together the God who continues to recreate us. Amen.

**A PERSONAL MEDITATION:
EASTER 4C 2016
PSALM 23**

The people who attend “Worship on Thursday” have many favourite songs and hymns, especially those written by Sister Monica Brown, who continues to bless with her messages; but the all-time favourite amongst us all is based on Psalm 23. *“The Lord is my shepherd, I don’t need a thing, I slumber in the meadow, cool water I drink. And when I’m rested, and he’s quieted my fears, he sends me back out walking, my path straight and clear...”*¹ I love the concept that it is only when we are rested and our fears are quietened and laid to rest, that our God sends us back out walking along the pathways of life, whether that path is rough, steep, flat or smooth. According to the word of the song, whatever the condition of the path, God blesses us with the timeless promise that our path will be *“...straight and clear...”*¹ even as we walk the path we have been called by our Guiding Shepherd to fulfil.

Creative pause: My Good Shepherd quietens all my fears and anxious doubts.

The chorus words are: *“...So I am not afraid, your rod and staff protect me, no evil will I fear, Lord, as I’m walking through the valley. And I am not afraid I know it’s me you carry; with you by my side, Lord, I’ll make it through the valley...”*¹ God only sends us out when with God’s help we are capable of dealing with the “darkest valleys” of life and also any threats from misadventure; or lack of appropriate care on our part. Also, with God’s help and blessing, as we travel *“through the valley”*¹ we need not fear any evil, for God will actually carry us over the rougher parts of that “valley” journey. So, we need not fear any evil or any obstacles along that pathway, protected as we are by God’s merciful *“...rod and staff...”*¹ – whatever those ‘tools’ are for you in life’s struggles.

Creative pause: What are the tools God places in your hands?

*“...My daily bread and water will surely fill me up, but you bring me a feast, Lord, and an overflowing cup. No, I am not afraid, your beauty’s all around me, with you by my side, Lord, I am not afraid.”*¹ How often do we convince ourselves that we are not worthy or ‘good enough’ for anything to sustain us except our *“...daily bread and water...”*?¹ Or, how often do we convince ourselves that living the plain and simple life and its pleasures are all we really need? Yet, *“...you bring me a feast, Lord, and an overflowing cup...”*¹ Or as “The Voice” translation presents it: *“...You care for all my needs, anointing my head with soothing, fragrant oil, filling my cup again and again with your grace...”*² It is only in and through God’s grace that shepherds us towards the right pathways; and that grace which journeys with us; who *“...even in the unending shadows of death’s darkness...”*² takes us by the hand to lead us through all our fears and anxious moments of doubt into the peace of trust of *“The Eternal is my shepherd, he cares for me always... makes me whole again..”*²

Creative pause: My Good Shepherd fills my cup to overflowing with grace and mercy.

¹ “Sing unto the Lord” #1 CD of a 3 CD Set
“The Lord is my shepherd, I don’t need a thing”
Based on Psalm 23
Words adapted and music by Jeanne Gere
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*Revised Indexing Scheme from 'Consultation on Church Union' (COCU).

I acknowledge and give heartfelt thanks for the theological inspiration available from the scholarship and writings of Professor Walter Brueggemann; and through the resources from the internet and "The Text this Week" (Textweek).

If the Prayers and/or Meditation are used in shared worship, please provide this acknowledgement.

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