



**SCRIPTURE READING: Psalm 23**

This is undoubtedly the most familiar psalm and probably the most familiar passage in all of the Bible. To be reminded that the Lord is our shepherd in difficult times is to be reminded of his deep care and real protection—especially as we walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, the deep darkness of these times. But I’ve always loved the last verse of this psalm.

A Free Church of Scotland pastor, Douglas MacMillan, remembered an old Highland ruling elder who was also a shepherd. That old shepherd had two dogs named Goodness and Mercy. Sheep being what they are, they tend to wander off; but when that shepherd’s sheep did so, Goodness and Mercy would run out after the sheep, circle them, and bring them back on the path. And so, those two dogs, Goodness and Mercy, literally chased those sheep to make sure they made it home safely.

What does the psalm say? “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” Don’t forget it: God’s good sheep dogs, goodness and mercy, are making sure you make it to God’s home safely. He is your faithful Father.

**HYMN: “THE KING OF LOVE MY SHEPHERD IS” Trinity Hymnal 184 (Tune: St. Columba)**

The King of love my Shepherd is, whose goodness faileth never;  
I nothing lack if I am his and he is mine forever.

Where streams of living water flow my ransomed soul he leadeth,  
and where the verdant pastures grow, with food celestial feedeth.

Perverse and foolish oft I strayed, but yet in love he sought me,  
and on his shoulder gently laid, and home, rejoicing, brought me.

In death’s dark vale I fear no ill with thee, dear Lord, beside me;  
thy rod and staff my comfort still, thy cross before to guide me.

Thou spread’st a table in my sight; thine unction grace bestoweth;  
and O what transport of delight from thy pure chalice floweth.

And so through all the length of days thy goodness faileth never:  
Good Shepherd, may I sing thy praise within thy house forever.

**PRAYER:**

O Lord, my Good Shepherd, grant me grace in this season not to feel my lack. So much has been taken away it seems: work, community, play, sports, arts, and above all, corporate worship. I feel as though I am walking through a deep valley of dark shadows where there is little light. Give me ears to hear you chasing me, not with anger and wrath, but with goodness and mercy. Salve my soul with your love and satiate me with your goodness, both now and always, in the name of Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, Amen.

**CATECHISM: Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 26**

What do you believe when you say, “I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth”?

That the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who out of nothing created heaven and earth and everything in them, who still upholds and rules them by his eternal counsel and providence, is my God and Father because of Christ the Son. I trust God so much that I do not doubt he will provide whatever I need for body and soul, and will turn to my good whatever adversity he sends upon me in this sad world. God is able to do this because he is almighty God and desires to do this because he is a faithful Father.



### SCRIPTURE READING: Job 1

When we read Job 1, it reminds us of what some folks go through. Think about someone living in Nashville right now: their home destroyed by tornado, perhaps; followed by this novel coronavirus; chased by news that their father living in Texas had a stroke but can't receive visitors in the hospital because of the virus. Just one hard thing after another.

How submissive Job's response to all of this was! "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). He could only say this because he believed that the Lord's tender (yet sometimes severe) mercies were present in every situation, that the Lord's name would be praised regardless of circumstance, and that the Lord's salvation would be present for him even in the midst of these trials. Indeed, part of the wisdom that Job's book offers to us is a recognition that living with God in our sights because God has us in his is the very best place to be (Job 28:28). After all, he is your faithful Father.

### HYMN: "TENDER MERCY" Roley & Pitts

Hear my cry for mercy as I call to you,  
 as I lift my hands in Spirit and in Truth.  
 We cry mercy (in the name of the Father most Holy).  
 We cry mercy (in the name of the Son who was slain).  
 Lord have mercy (in the name of the Spirit indwelling), tender mercy, Lord.  
 You are mercy (in the name of the Father most Holy).  
 You are mercy (in the name of the Son who was slain).  
 Lord have mercy (in the name of the Spirit indwelling), tender mercy, Lord.

In your tender mercy, brought by grace through faith,  
 I will lift my heart toward your most Holy place.  
 We cry mercy (in the name of the Father most Holy).  
 We cry mercy (in the name of the Son who was slain).  
 Lord have mercy (in the name of the Spirit indwelling), tender mercy, Lord.  
 You are mercy (in the name of the Father most Holy).  
 You are mercy (in the name of the Son who was slain).  
 Lord have mercy (in the name of the Spirit indwelling), tender mercy, Lord.  
 We cry mercy; we cry mercy. Lord have mercy, tender mercy, Lord.

### PRAYER:

O faithful Father, right now it feels as though one bad thing after another is happening. The future that we cannot see is overwhelming the present in which we live. You have given us so much, and yet some of us are having that taken away—health, work, family, life. Grant us grace not to sin with our words, thoughts, or deeds, but rather to trust in you, knowing that your mercies are still governing all of our lives. We say with Job, "Blessed be the name of the Lord," because you have come to us in Jesus Christ and rescued us. It is in his blessed name we pray, Amen.

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**SCRIPTURE READING: Isaiah 55:6-13**

This section in Isaiah 55 comes right after an invitation to come to the waters and drink deeply of the grace that God offers. In response, to this invitation, Isaiah urges his people to “seek the Lord while he may be found” (Isa 55:6). And this command to seek the Lord is empowered by God’s active and empowering word, which “shall not return to me empty” but “shall accomplish that which I purposed” (55:11). And of course, that purpose is our salvation.

The result of that salvation is a new world in which all creation joins in praise of Almighty God, mountains and hills singing, trees clapping their hands. This is all because the curse is reversed. No more thorns and briars—instead God will raise up cypress and myrtle trees. And our repentance, our seeking the Lord, is the first sign to the world that he will make it new again. God can do this because he is Almighty God; he delights to do this because he is your faithful Father.

**HYMN: “JOY TO THE WORLD! THE LORD IS COME” Trinity Hymnal 195**

Joy to the world! The Lord is come: let earth receive her King;  
let every heart prepare him room, and heav’n and nature sing,  
and heav’n and nature sing, and heav’n, and heav’n and nature sing.

Joy to the earth! The Savior reigns: let men their songs employ;  
while fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains repeat the sounding joy,  
repeat the sounding joy, repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground;  
he comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found,  
far as the curse is found, far as, far as the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the nations prove  
the glories of his righteousness and wonders of his love,  
and wonders of his love, and wonders, wonders of his love.

**PRAYER:**

Almighty God, we bless you that you do not think the way we think and that you do not act the way we act. We bless you that you are not limited by time or space and you can do abundantly more than we can ask or imagine. And so, by your Word, make us new: grant us grace to seek you, to drink deeply of your love, and to feast freely on your forgiveness. And in making us new, may we show the world where it is heading: mountains and hills leading the parade, bursting in songs; all the trees of the forest clapping their hands; and all of God’s people laughing and rejoicing forever, Amen.

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**SCRIPTURE READING: Romans 11:33-36**

This doxology, which draws together the previous eleven chapters of Romans, in itself is a powerful word of praise. It encourages us to explore how *deep* God's ways are: "Oh the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!" God always uses the best means to the best ends—and that is certainly the case with respect to our salvation. Both in the "narrow" sense of sending his Son Jesus to die in the place of sinners and in the "broad" sense of saving both Jew and Gentile in just this way—we see how deep God's ways are.

This word of praise also encourages us to see how *high* God's ways are: "How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!" In Isaiah 55, God tells us that his thoughts and ways are not at all like ours; here we confess that his thoughts and ways are beyond us. Finally, we praise our God for how wide his ways are: "For from him and through him and to him are all things." There is not a single thing in this world that is outside his purposes or control. No wonder we are called to praise him! He is both almighty God and our faithful Father.

**HYMN: "THE PERFECT WISDOM OF OUR GOD" Getty**

The perfect wisdom of our God, revealed in all the universe:  
all things created by his hand, and held together at his command.  
He knows the mysteries of the seas, the secrets of the stars are his;  
he guides the planets on their way, and turns the earth through another day.

The matchless wisdom of his ways, that mark the path of righteousness;  
his word a lamp unto my feet, his Spirit teaching and guiding me.  
And oh, the mystery of the cross, that God should suffer for the lost  
so that the fool might shame the wise, and all the glory might go to Christ!

Oh grant me wisdom from above, to pray for peace and cling to love,  
and teach me humbly to receive the sun and rain of your sovereignty.  
Each strand of sorrow has a place within this tapestry of grace;  
so through the trials I choose to say: "Your perfect will in your perfect way."

**PRAYER (from the hymn, "O God beyond All Praising," by Michael Perry):**

O God beyond all praising, we worship you today and sing the love amazing that songs cannot repay. For we can only wonder at every gift you send, at blessings without number and mercies without end. We lift our hearts before you and wait upon your Word. We honor and adore you, our great and mighty Lord, Amen.

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**SCRIPTURE READING: Luke 6:43-49**

Luke 6 is the “sermon on the plain,” a lengthy sermon that Jesus delivers that shares a great deal of content with the more familiar Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. These last verses are an example of that shared content—the parables of two kinds of trees and two kinds of houses (cf. Matthew 7:15-20, 24-27). Both parables share the same goal, namely, challenging God’s people to see whether or not they actually believe in Jesus as Savior and King.

The main point of the parable of the two kinds of trees is simple: those who have new hearts produce new “fruits,” new deeds of obedience to Jesus; those who do not have new hearts cannot produce godly speech, actions, or living. The parable of the two kinds of houses is slightly different: it speaks to the foundation upon which we build our lives, a foundation that will only be revealed when the “storms” of life come. Those who build on the solid rock, namely faith in Jesus Christ, are able to withstand the difficulties that life brings. Do you have a new heart? Have you built on the right foundation? What is this “storm” showing you?

**HYMN: “MY HOPE IS BUILT ON NOTHING LESS” Trinity Hymnal 521**

My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness;  
I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus’ name.  
On Christ, the solid rock, I stand; all other ground is sinking sand,  
all other ground is sinking sand.

When darkness veils his lovely face, I rest on his unchanging grace;  
in every high and stormy gale, my anchor holds within the veil.  
On Christ, the solid rock, I stand; all other ground is sinking sand,  
all other ground is sinking sand.

His oath, his covenant, his blood support me in the whelming flood;  
when all around my soul gives way, he then is all my hope and stay.  
On Christ, the solid rock, I stand; all other ground is sinking sand,  
all other ground is sinking sand.

When he shall come with trumpet sound, O may I then in him be found;  
dressed in his righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the throne.  
On Christ, the solid rock, I stand; all other ground is sinking sand,  
all other ground is sinking sand.

**PRAYER:**

O Lord, as the storms of life batter the house of my faith, hold me fast. I know that you are the solid rock—you are as solid as El Capitan in Yosemite. Even if everything else in this sad world gives way, you are holding fast to me, even as I am clinging to you. Your oath, your covenant, your blood—that’s where I run in difficult times. Please remind me that this adversity will not undo me because you promise that no one can pluck me from your hand or separate me from your love. Thank you, Lord. Amen.

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**SCRIPTURE READING: Jeremiah 17:1-18**

Jeremiah preached to God's people right as the Babylonians were beginning to lay siege to Jerusalem. He continued to confront them with their sin even beyond Jerusalem's fall in 586 BC. And yet, even in this confrontation, there is compassion. First, Jeremiah tells them that there is a stark difference between the one who trusts the Lord and the one who trusts himself. Those who trust themselves are "like a shrub in the desert and shall not see any good come," while those who trust in the Lord are "like a tree planted by water" (Jer. 17:6, 8; cf. Psalm 1:2). Clearly, there is still hope for those who trust in the Lord.

Next, Jeremiah reminds the people that God's throne remains in the temple—he is still "the hope of Israel" (Jer. 17:12). Even though the earthly temple would be destroyed, the heavenly temple cannot be touched by humans; thus, God is still our hope. Finally, Jeremiah models how to pray through his own authentic cries. He cries out to be healed even as he asks God not to be "a terror to me"; instead, he longs for God to be "my refuge in the day of trouble" (Jer. 17:14, 17). In each of these ways, we find God's compassion to his own, for us today, for our God is our faithful Father.

**HYMN: "I'LL NOT BE SHAKEN (PSALM 62)" Kimbrough**

For God alone, I wait in silence; my soul is still before the Lord.  
He is my rock and my salvation, my fortress strong; I trust in him.  
I'll not be shaken! I'll not be shaken for all my hope is in his love.  
From God alone comes my salvation; I wait and trust his steadfast love!

Put not your hope in gain of riches; seek not your rest in empty wealth.  
The rich are weak; the poor are mighty, who turn to God alone for help.  
I'll not be shaken! I'll not be shaken for all my hope is in his love.  
From God alone comes my salvation; I wait and trust his steadfast love!

Pour out your heart to God our refuge and trust in him to hear you cry.  
No other hope will never fail you; no other love will not run dry.  
I'll not be shaken! I'll not be shaken for all my hope is in his love.  
From God alone comes my salvation; I wait and trust his steadfast love!

**PRAYER:**

Heal us, O Lord, and we shall be healed. Save us, and we shall be saved. For you are our praise and our only source of true delight in this world. We have not run away from you; we have not desired days of sickness or folly. Do not terrorize us, O Lord, but be our refuge in this time of trouble. We look to your throne, set in the heavenly temple, upon which you sit, ruling over your world. You are our hope, O Lord; not ours only, but also the hope of the whole world, through Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray, Amen.

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**SCRIPTURE READING: Luke 4:14-21**

When Jesus announces his ministry, there were a lot of different texts he could have picked. He could have picked Psalm 2, declaring that he is the Anointed, the eternal Son of the Father, who has come to rule from Zion's holy hill. He could have picked Psalm 45, showing that he was the beloved bridegroom coming for his bride, Israel. He could have chosen Psalm 72, heralding the fact that he was the chosen one ruling from sea to shining sea. He could have chosen Psalm 110, Isaiah 7, 9, and 11, or any number of texts.

But he chose Isaiah 61. And using that text, he says three things. First, he declares that he is the anointed one, the Messiah. Next, he declares what he has come to do. The summary statement is "to proclaim good news to the poor"; although, fleshing that out means not only proclamation, but healing and restoration—both word and deed. Finally, he makes it clear that now is the day of salvation for all who are poor, captive, blind, and oppressed. Those are both spiritual, but also physical realities, as the Gospels make clear. In the midst of our adversity, we find that Jesus' good news meets us right where we are. Now is the year of the Lord's favor! Let us rejoice in him!

**HYMN: "HAIL TO THE LORD'S ANOINTED" Trinity Hymnal 311**

Hail to the Lord's Anointed, great David's greater Son!  
Hail, in the time appointed, his reign on earth begun!  
He comes to break oppression, to set the captive free,  
to take away transgression, and rule in equity.

He comes with comfort speedy to those who suffer wrong;  
to help the poor and needy, and bid the weak be strong;  
to give them songs for sighing, their darkness turn to light,  
whose souls, condemned and dying, were precious in his sight.

He shall come down like showers upon the fruitful earth;  
and love, joy, hope, like flowers, spring in his path to birth;  
before him on the mountains shall peace, the herald, go;  
and righteousness, in fountains, from hill to valley flow.

O'er ev'ry foe victorious, he on his throne shall rest,  
from age to age more glorious, all-blessing and all-blessed;  
the tide of time shall never his covenant remove;  
his name shall stand forever—that name to us is Love.

**PRAYER:**

O Lord Jesus Christ, eternal Son of the Father, I praise you and adore you as the Lord's anointed. You see me in the totality of my need, both body and soul: you see me as poor, as captive, as blind, as oppressed. Lord Jesus, give me ears to hear your good news: that you have come to set me free, to let me see, to follow you freely. Grant me grace never to tire of this good news or this good time, this year of your favor to sinners like me. May your name stand forever in my heart and life and in this world, your name that is Love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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