

+ IN THE NAME OF JESUS +

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
The Fourth Sunday of Easter

April 21, 2024

“THOU ART WITH ME”*PSALM 23*

As children, we experienced fear of the dark. Only Mom or Dad could banish our fears. But it wasn't just what they _____. Anyone could say those words. It wasn't a promise that the fears would never return. Those monsters might be back tomorrow night. It was simply the fact that Mom or Dad was _____. By their p_____, we felt secure.

We still fear the dark, even if it is a different sort of darkness. When things go b_____ in the n_____, we are blessed to be able to pray with David, *“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for **“Thou Art with Me”**”*.

I. WE WANT SOMEONE TO FACE WITH US OUR FEAR OF S_____, DEATH, AND L_____.

We all are alone with our fears at some point. And the evils of the real world are darker than the childish fears of the night, for they not i_____. But the comfort is the same – the p_____ of others. Loved ones come, not with naive promises that our troubles will v_____, but to wait, watch, and be with us. That presence gives us peace. We are not alone.

For Israel in the wilderness, the sacraments of God's presence were the pillar of fire by night and of cloud by day. In an unknown wilderness, their comfort was the Lord who was not directing their journey from a_____. He was _____ them, guiding them through the uncertainties and threats around them, and defending them, as much from their f_____ as from their e_____.

We, like Israel, are pilgrims in a wilderness. Sin has surrounded us with darkness and filled us with f_____. Our great enemy is _____, and our fear is that we should d_____ before we fully l_____. Life's only sure thing is Death. It stalks us our whole life and steers us toward a future filled with pain, sorrow, and disappointment.

We try to find refuge in worldly c_____, try to condense a lifetime of living into some great e_____, but this only feeds our loneliness. It makes those around us our c_____, as if we must steal from them to get what we want from life. My spouse becomes an a_____ whose task is to keep life from becoming empty. An a_____ on the side provides the excitement I crave. Kids give me something to brag about. I use my _____ to fill my life with toys, since the one who dies with the most toys wins. But that job better give me lots of t_____ off to play with those toys. Or, maybe it needs to c_____ all my time so I won't have any time think about how quickly it will all be g_____.

We are the scattered sheep who go our own way in pursuit of an elusive d_____, unaware of how lost and vulnerable we are – until life comes crashing down on us.

II. JESUS COMES TO BE WITH US IN OUR FEARS OF SIN, LONELINESS, AND DEATH.

He is the Good Shepherd. He knows his own better than they know themselves. He gives them his _____ so they can hear his call and know the safety of his presence, the grace that supplies all their n_____, the food that satisfies their hunger, and the water that cleanses and r_____ them. He comes as the only one who can restore their souls, wash away their f_____, and bind their wounds with his righteousness.

We are threatened by evil and surrounded by enemies; but we are not a_____. He is with us. Finding and restoring us cost him nothing less than his own holy life surrendered on the cross to the d_____ that should have been ours. But he is the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep.

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me” (v 4). These are more than f_____ words. They are the security of children crying out in d_____ for comfort and peace. This is not a carnival barker's pitch that, if you get it right and get right with _____, you'll have all the health, wealth, happiness and pleasure you want. It is no shallow Gospel promising a hope that e_____ the cross, nor is it the world's wishful thinking, *“There, there,*

now; it will be okay." This is honest fear, real life, real troubles, all met by the honest and real _____ who willingly left heaven to face for you this mortal life and all its wounds and hurts; the honest and real Savior who dies your death and declares you r _____ so that you might share in his abundant life; the honest and real Savior who whispers to you in the midst of your fears: " _____ "

So, we have come to sit at the Table he has prepared, while our enemies stare with frustrated dismay into the God who has become his people's _____ and their f _____. We have we come to have our soiled and wounded heads anointed with the oil of h _____ and gladness by the Good Shepherd who calls us each by name. We have come to see our cup of blessing overflow with the lavish richness of his grace.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our lives, for the Lord _____ is with us. Our sin could not s _____ him away, and our death could not h _____ him. So, we shall dwell in his house – here, for as long as time is given, and forever in the place where time is no more.

III. JESUS IS THE GIFT – GIVEN TO AND PRESENT WITH US THROUGH HIS W _____ AND S _____

The temptation is to separate Jesus from his gifts, the means of his p _____ (the Word and Sacraments), the good news of his G _____. But what calms our fears and anchors our hope is not some groundless earthly promise that troubles will v _____ and enemies d _____. What calms our fears and anchors our hope is that the Good Shepherd is with us – even th _____ life's troubles, even in the p _____ of our enemies, amid the burdens and disappointments of this mortal life. He is here with all his gifts and graces cleansing us from sin, sustaining us for the journey, carrying us through the un _____, keeping us in his protective care, and opening to us the door of life everlasting. Our joy is not that he has brought more t _____ for us to p _____ with. Our joy is that _____ is here. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep and takes it up again, that he might give that life to us.

The child crying out in the night is only calmed by the loving p _____ of his parents. It is not what they bring, but that they are _____. And for us, our comfort is not in the st _____ God gives. It is in his very p _____. That presence is your e _____. He gathers us lambs in his arms and carries us in his bosom. He leads us, young and old, where hunger and thirst, death and fear are no more (Is 40:11). He is what the table he prepares o _____. It is in the presence of our enemies, but it's also his p _____. That presence calms our troubled hearts and calls us to rejoice. That presence, with us now in _____ and _____, quiets our fears, strengthens weary hearts, our soothes harried lives. His rod and staff are his Means of G _____ that comfort us in all our needs and provide us with more than enough to s _____ us on the journey as he leads us to our eternal home.

"I am here," says your Good Shepherd. With you, not in the fickle f _____ of the heart, or the fleeting th _____ of the mind, or the passing g _____ of the moment, but in his Means of Grace, concrete and real – your Baptism, a d _____ in history; his Table, here undeniably, visibly, to be t _____ today. "Do not fear," he says. He is here with all his grace and mercy to forgive every sin and overcome death and the grave. "I know your name," he says; not the way one knows a f _____, but the way a p _____ knows and loves their _____ and his needs.

He won't a _____ you. He won't depart from you. He loves you too much to turn from you now. The only thing you need to supply all your wants for this day and for eternity, the only thing you need to know, is this: _____

FOR REFLECTION:

1. (Law) What are some things we try to use to calm our fears?
2. (Gospel) What is the truth that makes our fears ultimately groundless?