

April 26, 2026

Easter 4 YrA 2026 Sermon; John 10:1-11, Psalm 23; Acts 2:42-47; 1 Peter 2:19-25

There is a deep, almost instinctive comfort that rises in us when we hear the words from the first verse of Psalm 23, “The Lord is my Shepherd.” It’s a metaphor. In ancient times a shepherd cared for sheep—guiding them, protecting them, and making sure they had food and safety. So when David (the writer of the psalm) calls God his Shepherd, he’s saying:

- God guides him in life
- God protects him from harm
- God cares for his needs personally It shows a close, trusting relationship—like sheep trusting their Shepherd. Therefore, we are invited by the Gospel today to recognize that we are sheep of his fold, lambs of his own flock, and sinners of his own redeeming. This is more than a sentimental image, but a profound truth about who Jesus is and who we are as his beloved and redeemed people. For “He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.”¹ The God who shaped the galaxies knows your name — knows your wounds, your fears, your wandering, your longing. And He leads us still, not pushing from behind, but going before us into every valley, every uncertainty, every new beginning. Our Lord is the Good Shepherd because when danger draws near, He does not abandon or forget us. Whatever we face — peace or conflict, hope or dread, life or death, joy or sorrow — God remains with us. Moreover, Jesus unveils the tenderness of God’s care, as he declares, “I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.”² In a first century sheepfold, the Shepherd literally became the door. At night he would lie across the opening so that:

- no sheep could wander out unprotected,
 - no predator could enter unnoticed.
- By him we are saved, meaning that we are:

- rescued from danger,
- delivered from sin and death,
- and brought into a secure relationship with God.

When he tells us that we can “come in and go out,” it evokes a picture of one who is:

- safe enough to rest,
- free enough to graze,
- confident enough to move without fear.

One of my favorite pictures of Jesus shows him gently holding a lamb in his arms. It is an image that was presented to many of us when we were children. It evokes feelings that our Lord cares for us and protects us. He knows us intimately, and we are his. The difficulty modern culture has with news like this is that it suggests human beings are like sheep—dependent, vulnerable, and unable to flourish without a shepherd. We resist that image. We do not want to see ourselves as that needy, that limited, or that dependent on anyone outside ourselves.

When I first began my Christian journey, I quickly discovered that spiritual discernment does not come naturally or easily. I wanted to discover God's will for my life, but I needed time to grow and learn God's ways. I met people who were passionate and persuasive, yet the fruit of their ministries often produced confusion, spiritual distortion, and even bondage. In those early days, I found myself praying words very close to those of our opening collect. In my own language, I said, Good Shepherd of my soul, please lead me, guide me, protect me, and show me the truth."

On the Episcopal Church's Sermons That Work website, Michael Toy observes, "Like sheep, humans can be led astray. Humans like to follow others." And like sheep, we can also be unaware of the dangers around us. He notes that these are not flaws or failures—they are simply human qualities. When I lived in Northern Virginia, a parishioner who had grown up on a sheep farm once told me that if one sheep got frightened and jumped a fence, the rest would follow without hesitation. She laughed and said, "Caring for such dumb animals was a piece of work." Then she further commented, many creatures can survive in the wild—wild horses, wild cats, wild dogs—but there are no wild sheep. And the reason is simple: left to themselves, sheep inevitably wander into perilous danger, and without a shepherd, they do not survive. It has been observed that if you do not find Jesus as the great Shepherd, you will inevitably seek that shepherding—this deep care, guidance, and protection—from some human being or institution. Or you will try to shoulder it yourself. Either way, you will eventually run into your own limits and grow hopelessly depressed and cynical. Yet despite our carelessness and wandering hearts, the Good Shepherd remains unwavering in His love. He never turns away. Instead, He leads His beloved into the very life for which we were created — a life full and abundant.

In Scripture, the word abundant calls to mind a river swollen by heavy rains, spilling over its banks. That is the picture Jesus offers us. The abundant life is one in which we rest secure, trusting that God's grace is more than enough for every need, that nothing can diminish it, and that His favor toward us never runs dry. Psalm 23 paints this abundance most strikingly. Its portrayal of the relationship between the Shepherd and His sheep is deeply personal and profoundly intimate. In fact, it contains more first-person pronouns—"I," "me," "my," and "mine"—than any other psalm. The entire psalm is framed as a testimony of a soul who knows the Shepherd not from a distance, but from within the closeness of His care. In it, he declares: The Lord is my Shepherd That's a Relationship based on his every present care! I shall not want That's Supply! This doesn't mean "I'll never desire anything." It means:

- I won't lack what I truly need
- God will provide enough—physically, emotionally, and spiritually
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures -- That's Rest!
He leadeth me beside the still waters -- That's Refreshment!
He restoreth my soul. -- That's Healing!
He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness -- That's Guidance!
For His name's sake -- That's Purpose!

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death -- That's honesty about life's harsh realities.

I will fear no evil -- That's Protection!

For Thou art with me -- That's Faithfulness!

Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me -- That's Discipline!

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies -- That's Hope!

Thou annointest my head with oil. -- That consecration sets us apart for service!

My cup runneth over -- That's Abundance!

Moreover, Psalm 23 was written by David from the vantage point of a life seasoned by years and a faith tempered through many trials. After recounting all the Shepherd's provisions, David adds one final blessing that surpasses them all: he lacks nothing because he has a home with God. He is blessed in this life, but his experience of God's goodness does not end here. It stretches into eternity. And so he concludes with confidence, "Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (Ps. 23:6).

St. Augustine was right when he said, "Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in thee." Amen.