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Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado
Easter 4, Series B (Good Shepherd Sunday)
Saturday, April 21st, 2018
Sunday, April 22nd, 2018

Sermon: I Shall Not Want

Texts: Psalm 23:1

Focus: God gives us everything we need.

Function: That they would be content and thankful for all of God's gifts.

Structure: Text-Application

Locus: "He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life" (SC, First Article of Apostles' Creed).

Alleluia! Christ is risen! *He is risen indeed! Alleluia!* "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want" (Ps. 23:1, ESV).¹ So begins the most famous Psalm of all, the shepherd psalm memorized by children, prayed in the hospital, and whispered at funerals. So also begins the confusing phrase that perplexed me as a child. "I shall not want." What does this mean? As I child I supposed that it meant it was wrong for me to want things, to desire certain delights or long for different circumstances. "I shall not want." Stop complaining, be content with what you have, don't covet—and all that bit! Wanting is selfish. Wanting doesn't help anyone else. Wanting shows a lack of faith. Be happy with what you have. Wanting is wrong! Have you ever heard anything like that? Of course, when I was a child who always wanted the latest toy or gadget, the Twenty-Third Psalm smacked on my spirit like a slap on the wrist. "I shall not want." Oh, well! I guess not. Thanks, anyway. "I shall not want." God is good for needs, but I guess you have to make a wish list for Santa Claus (or at least Amazon.com) in order to get your wants met.

¹ All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

But this interpretation of the Psalm is entirely wrong. Here modern English lets us down. Most English versions reflect the old King James translation. But the word “want” meant something different 400 years ago than it does today. Back then “want” meant “to be in need” or “to lack something necessary.” The NIV gets closer when it reads, “I shall not be *in want*.” But the literal Hebrew means “Yahweh is my shepherd; I shall not *lack*.” I shall not lack. That has a very different ring to it than “I shall not want,” doesn’t it?

When Yahweh is our shepherd—when *Jesus* is our *Good Shepherd*—we shall lack nothing because he is the God who loves to give his children gifts. As the apostle James writes, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change” (Jas. 1:17). Jesus the Good Shepherd leads his little lambs to green pastures and quiet waters. He defends us from foes. He is even with us in the deep, dark valley of death’s shadow. He prepares a table for us; our cup overflows with his blessing. Goodness and mercy follow us (literally, *pursue* us!) our entire life. And we shall dwell in his holy presence forever. He even laid down his life for us on the cross in order that he might take it up again (John 10:15, 17). So what do we lack? Nothing, if the Lord Jesus is our Good Shepherd. Indeed, Jesus insists, “If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it” (John 14:14).

In the Small Catechism, Martin Luther describes God’s gracious provision this way: “He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, [spouse] and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life...” (SC, 1st Article).

God gives us everything we need for our body and soul. Above all, he gives us his Son Jesus. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that whoever believes in him

should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). If we believe and trust in the crucified and risen Lord Jesus, we will have no lack in our life. God will give us everything we need.

And that paves way for us to ask God for the things we want too. As David writes in Psalm 37, “Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart” (Ps. 37:4). Pour out your heart to the Lord. Let him know what you need *and* want. He loves to answer prayer and give you what is good.

Just don’t fall into the trap of thinking that prayer is like asking a genie to grant you three wishes. While it is not wrong to want, it *is* wrong to covet. God does not promise to give us everything we ask for. Not everything we want is good or healthy for us. Some gifts we are not yet ready to receive—they’re not right for us *right now*.

Lisa and I do everything we can to avoid taking the boys into the grocery store with us. We usually wait until they’re in bed and then Lisa goes shopping while I stay home with them. Why? Because if Benjamin and Michael go to the store, they beg for candy, cookies, chips, and Hot Wheels cars. If it were up to them, our boys would only eat from the four main food groups: sugar, salt, fat, and cholesterol! But if we did that, they would probably end up in the hospital obese, diabetic, or malnourished. Snacks and sweets are okay on occasion, but of course they need fruits, vegetables, proteins, and cereal grains. That’s what’s good for them. Sure, of course, we delight in giving them dessert when they eat a good dinner, but giving our boys everything they ask for would ruin them.

So it is with us and the Good Shepherd. God gives us everything we need and many of the things we want. “I shall not lack.” He promises to give us everything we ask for in *his* name, which means according to his will, his purposes, and his desires for us. Indeed, when we delight ourselves in the Lord, the Holy Spirit re-attunes our hearts to be in harmony with God’s

will for us. Before we pray in humble faith, our desires are disordered and discordant with the melody God wants us to sing in our hearts. But when we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all these other things are added to us (cf. Matt. 6:33). For “your heavenly Father knows that you need them all” (Matt. 6:32). Remember: If Yahweh is your shepherd, you shall not lack.

I once read about a little girl who misquoted Psalm 23 in a wonderful way: “The Lord is my shepherd; that’s all I want.” We may chuckle at her mishearing, but I would feign to call it a misunderstanding. Well it would be for us to be able to say in earnest that having the Lord as our shepherd is all that we want. How content we should be to have that as our heart’s desire! We do not want because Jesus is all we want, all we need, the ultimate desire of our heart. Our greatest need was to be rescued from the power of sin, death, and the devil, which Jesus accomplished by his death and resurrection. Because Jesus died and lives again, we “shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever” (Ps. 23:6).

John gives us a beautiful picture of this heavenly dwelling in his Apocalypse:

“These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Rev. 7:14-17).

Did you notice how this imagery is inspired by the Twenty-Third Psalm with its mention of shepherds and sheep and springs of living water? In the new heaven and the new earth, there will be no more hunger, no more thirst, no more painful labor, no more death, no more disease—and no more want. “The Lord is my shepherd; that’s *all* I want.” I hope that’s all you want too.

For when Yahweh is your shepherd, you lack no good thing because Jesus the Good Shepherd is your greatest good. Alleluia! Christ is risen! *He is risen indeed! Alleluia!* Amen.