

A modern re-writing of the 23rd Psalm may look something like this.

The TV and my phone are my shepherd, I shall not want,
It makes me to lie down on the sofa.
They leads me away from the Faith,
They destroys my soul.
They lead me to the path of sex and violence for the advertiser's sake.
Even though I walk in the shadow of Christian responsibilities,
there will be no interruption, for the TV and phone are with me.
The cable, internet and remote control, they comfort me.
They prepare a commercial for me in the midst of my worldliness
And anoints my head with secular humanism and consumerism.
My covetousness runs over;
Surely ignorance and laziness shall follow me all the days of my life,
And I shall dwell in the house of desolation, watching my TV and phone forever.

How many of us would find that version of the 23rd Psalm more fitting today? What do we look for in a shepherd? So many are OK with their shepherd being a government or entity that claims to want to take care of them but will only do so if they fit a pre-determined criteria that may be based on anything from race to gender to country of origin to political affiliation. How many people have replaced our true shepherd in God with a hired or elected shepherd? Many have a hard time believing in a God that takes a true personal interest in each and every one of us, hears each of our prayers and can be responsive to each of our individual needs. However, we have no problem believing that private industries, the internet and the government use various means to keep track of us all. We believe those earthly entities track us and most don't like that thought, but will accept it over God watching over us because he truly loves us.

That's why the gospel reading of the Good Shepherd should be so refreshing to us. Our Gospel points us to the truth that no one could care for us as deeply, eternally or passionately as God does. If we trust in ourselves or others alone, we will eventually find a limit to our knowledge, our strength, or our health. Our Gospel tells us that God and God alone is the one in whom we place our trust.

Jesus compares a hired shepherd and an owner shepherd. Keep in mind that sheep have no built-in protection so to be safe, they need a shepherd. However, if the shepherd is a hired one who feels no true loyalty or passion about those sheep, one who looks at caring for them as nothing more than a job, then the sheep may be in jeopardy. Think of it this way, who is more likely to take care of a house, a renter or an owner, who is more likely to risk their life for a child, a parent or a babysitter? Who is more likely to truly care about you, a private company, a government or God?

We must always remember that Jesus is our true shepherd and that he loves us in a way no one else can. He knows each and every one of us by name, he takes a personal interest in us and never sees us as a business or a burden. Jesus makes it clear to us that he is willing to lay down

his life for us and he did...now how many private organizations and government officials have been willing to do that for you?

In the book, "The Last Temptation of Christ," the devil is a serpent slithering up the back side of the cross, out of view of everyone. He has come to issue Jesus one last great temptation. He whispered in Jesus' ear as He was dying, "O come on Jesus, look at them... they are not worth all this suffering. Give them what they deserve, give them hell." And Jesus says, "No, I would rather die than stop loving them."

That story tells us a great truth: that Jesus would rather die than stop loving us. To whomever needs to hear this...there is absolutely no limit to God's love, there is no enemy that can snatch us out of His hand, and there is no way he will stop caring for us. NO MATTER WHAT WE DO. This shepherd does not discriminate, He is the God of the Jews, and Samaritans, and Gentiles; He is the God of rejects, lepers, and thieves. He is the God of you and me, and those we call "them;" the God who knows all of us by name.

What we see in the good shepherd is an overwhelming desire on God's part to be with us, to be part of the human condition: to be part of our losses, our recessions, our disappointments, and our fractured relationships. He wants to be part of the deaths in our families, our addictions, all those things that can turn our life upside down. The message is clear: through all of this, the good times and the bad, God wants to be with us because he is our shepherd.

A young boy at a parish school was given a month to memorize Psalm 23. He was to recite it at a school assembly, with the pastor and all the parents attending. When the big night came, he stood up and began, "The Lord is my shepherd," and then his mind went blank. The people waited while he struggled to remember the next line. Finally, he started again, "The Lord is my Shepherd." He paused, and then said, "And that is all I need to know."

That boy summed up the 114 words found in the 23rd Psalm, possibly the most popular psalm in the Bible, to the five most important. And those are five words we need to remember today and always. The Lord is my Shepherd...