

**Life Abundant, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. X4080413**

**Psalm 23 and Acts 2:42-47**

**Elon Community Church, United Church of Christ, 13 April, 2008**

Listen to these five words: “The Lord is my shepherd”. What do those five words do to you? What do you think of? How do you feel when you hear them? “The Lord is my shepherd!” The *Lord* is my shepherd. The Lord is my *shepherd*. This is a psalm that has comforted countless millions through the ages. It puts us into proper perspective with our creator. When we allow God to be our shepherd, our leader, the one who comforts and confronts, guides, and protects us, life goes well for us. “Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.”

This is a psalm for springtime. Imagine the green pastures. Our lawns, trees, and bushes are all flourishing in green, especially after the lush spring rains we’ve experienced. How welcome that rain has been in the midst of the drought from which we are suffering. However, my green pastures are growing especially high right now.

My lawn needs cutting more than once a week: such is the abundance of God. God meets all of our needs: our need for rest; our need for refreshment; our need for food; our need for protection; and our need for housing. We may not get all of our wants or desires, for we want too much and we desire what others around us have, but God meets all of our needs.

The members of the early church found that they had enough. Their needs were met. They pooled their resources and distributed to any who were in need. Such is the abundance that God provides us.

“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” Walter Brueggemann says, “this phrase, ‘I shall not want’ is a decision made against the greed and lust and satiation and aggressive ambition of a consumer society. Our consumer society is driven by the notion that we always must want one more thing...” “I shall not want” is a statement. I will not compare what I have with what my neighbor has, nor will I give in to the desires of our consumer society that is trying to get me to purchase more, throw away more, use the precious resources of this earth more, and create gaps between the rich and the poor more. We need to refocus our desire, and we need as a community to share God's abundance more. While the voices of our consumer society tell us to desire things, we need to focus our attention on God’s voice that leads us beside still waters and in right paths.

Some of the phrasing in the psalm is interesting. “God *makes* me lie down in green pastures.” It is not enough that God provides us with rest and resting places, because we miss them due to our frenetic pace. We are so busy studying, or living a heavy social schedule, or trying to make another buck, that we miss the beauty around us. Sometimes, you see, God has to make us slow down our pace and enjoy the lush abundance of this world. Sometimes, we fall down in the green pastures, exhausted. Perhaps a broken leg or some chest pains are God’s ways of telling us to stop hurrying through life and enjoy what God has given us. Slow down and lie down in the green pastures.

God prepares “a table before me in the presence of my enemies.” I have, or at least I’m told that I have, many enemies: inflation; recession; terrorists; bullies; age; and death. God says, “Don’t be afraid! Sit down and eat. Sit down and eat right in front of them. They cannot harm you in the long run. Keep your priorities straight.

God provides the green pastures, but I have to lie down in them. God leads me beside still waters, but I have to do the walking. God prepares a table, but I have to sit down at it.

Tables are good. The table is the heart of what it means to be a Christian. The table is set with

lavish food and is surrounded by close friends and fellow travelers. These make inflation, recession, terrorists, bullies, age, and death less important. The table turns enemies into friends and makes us less fearful.

This is the table of hospitality. It is how our lives touch others. I picture the picnic tables that we have set out in past years to welcome students during their first days on campus. Deep friendships were forged at those tables. Students found new friends and church members found new energy.

In hospitality, we welcomed Michael Foreman. We touched his life and he touched ours. We are the richer for it, in spite of his pre-mature death. He reminded us that life is always short and life is always fragile. We need each other in this life, and it is at the table of hospitality where we find each other.

At this table of hospitality, we found Sharon Hammill and she found us. This afternoon, Sharon will be ordained into the Christian ministry. Although ministers are often called pastors, I have resisted that title which reflects shepherds and flocks of sheep. Church members are different than sheep; they have intelligence, although all of us need to be slapped up side the head every once in a while! We need ministers, leaders and fellow-journey-ers to remind us that God is our shepherd.

Sit down at the table prepared for you. Listen to the voice of the one who says, “fear no evil. I am with you. I will protect and comfort you. My goodness and mercy shall follow you all the days of your life.”