

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER



THE SERVICE FOR THE LORD'S DAY

May 3, 2020
10:45 a.m.

First Presbyterian Church, Bryan, Texas
Link to worship videos available at: www.fpcbryan.org

PREPARATION FOR WORSHIP

As the Deer

Martin Nystrom

WELCOME AND OPENING SENTENCES

We gather in the presence of our God:

Our shepherd, our guide

In his oaths of righteousness

Our souls shall be restored.

Let us worship in thankfulness.

HYMN No. 187

Savior, like a Shepherd Lead Us

BRADBURY

**¹ Savior, like a shepherd lead us, much we need your tender care;
In your pleasant pastures feed us, for our use your folds prepare:
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, you hast bought us, we are yours;
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, you hast bought us, we are yours.**

**² We are yours: in love befriend us; be the guardian of our way.
Keep your flock: from sin defend us; seek us when we go astray.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, hear your children when we pray;
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, hear your children when we pray.**

**³ You have promised to receive us, poor and sinful though we be;
you have mercy to relieve us, grace to cleanse, and power to free.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, early let us turn to you.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, early let us turn to you.**

**⁴ Early let us seek your favor; early let us do your will.
Blessed Lord and only Savior, with your love our spirits fill.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, you have loved us; love us still.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, you have loved us; love us still.**

OPENING PRAYER AND PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Holy shepherd, where you lead us you have prepared the way. Your hand, a gentle guide in uncertain times, yet we are timid and we place our certainty and our confidence in other leaders. We are drawn to the voices that compliment and strengthen our own desires and draw us in to the paths of darkness in the shadows of our own valleys. Taking these easier paths we are eager to find places of peace that do not come from your grace. Lord, when we wander, help us to hear your voice calling out to us, to feel your hands guiding us in the darkness, and to trust your will and your way. In the valleys in which we sit, we ask that you be with us as we speak to you now in these moments of silence.

Hold us near to you God and grant us mercy for the ways we have strayed from you. Amen.

Thanks be to God, in Jesus Christ we are forgiven and made whole.

HYMN OF RESPONSE NO. 581

Glory Be to the Father

GLORIA PATRI

SCRIPTURE READING

Psalm 23

Pew Bible, O. T., p. 581

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL PROCLAMATION

A Psalm for the Living

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING AND INTERCESSION, AND THE LORD'S PRAYER

Holy and Loving Lord, we come to you with thanks that you never leave us. In the valleys and on the mountaintops, you are always there, gently guiding us forward in this journey of life. As we make our way through this valley-time of COVID-19, help us to have discerning ears that we may hear your calling voice and feel your gentle nudges to be loving, thoughtful, and good to one another; and help us to remember that our first duty is to the will of your way and your instruction.

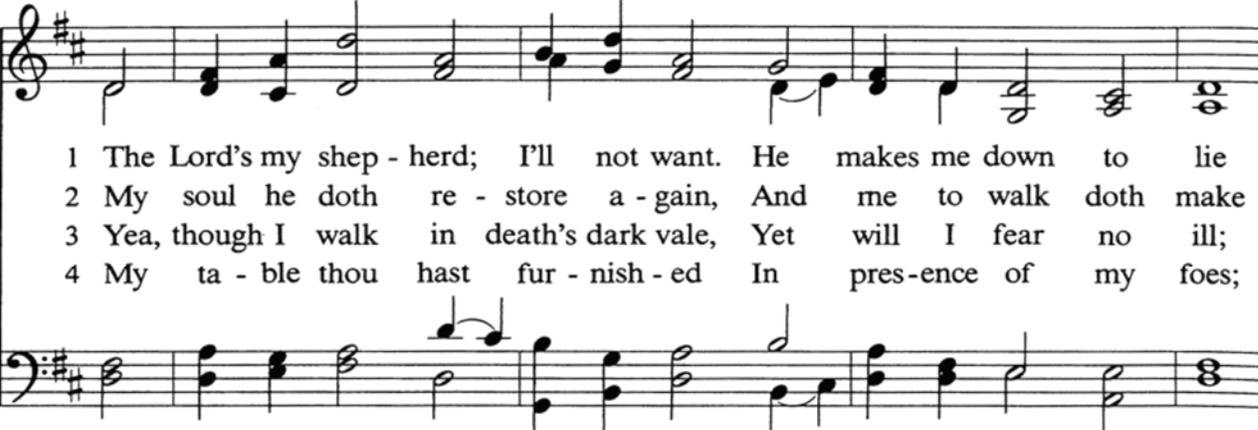
Help us to be mindful that though this valley is wide, we all journey together, and though these paths may be strenuous, be our strength, our guide, and our protector.

In the moments of despair, stress, anxiety, or hopelessness, help us to remember no emotion or situation or person has the final word in life. Only you, Alpha and Omega, have that power. Thanks to you we never need to fear what haunts our minds and grabs at our hearts, because you will always be there to take those into your own hands and upon your own shoulders. For all who are facing daunting perils, bring your peace and guide them past whirlpools and rapids into the still waters of the flowing rivers of time. Breathe new life into the tired, worn, and weary. Give light to the dim places of our souls that we may know what it is to be alive again.

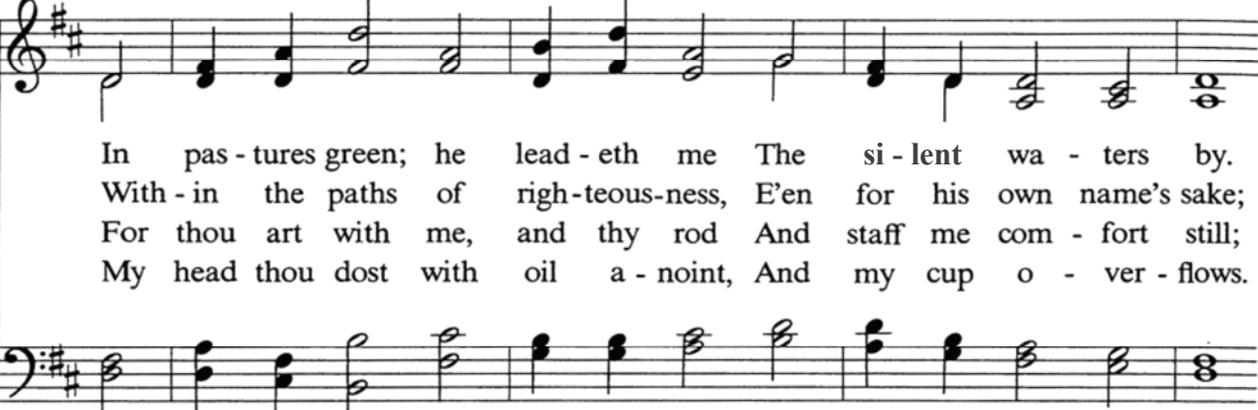
Eternal One, we pray all of this and more in your name, as Jesus taught us to pray together,

Our Father, who art in heaven; hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

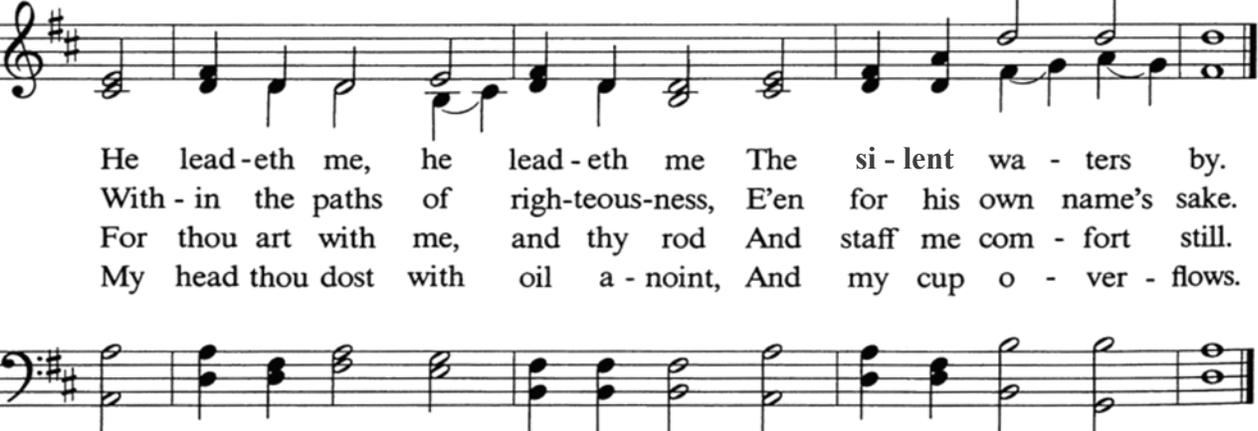
DISMISSAL AND BLESSING



1 The Lord's my shep - herd; I'll not want. He makes me down to lie
 2 My soul he doth re - store a - gain, And me to walk doth make
 3 Yea, though I walk in death's dark vale, Yet will I fear no ill;
 4 My ta - ble thou hast fur - nish - ed In pres - ence of my foes;



In pas - tures green; he lead - eth me The si - lent wa - ters by.
 With - in the paths of righ - teous - ness, E'en for his own name's sake;
 For thou art with me, and thy rod And staff me com - fort still;
 My head thou dost with oil a - noint, And my cup o - ver - flows.



He lead - eth me, he lead - eth me The si - lent wa - ters by.
 With - in the paths of righ - teous - ness, E'en for his own name's sake.
 For thou art with me, and thy rod And staff me com - fort still.
 My head thou dost with oil a - noint, And my cup o - ver - flows.

5 Goodness and mercy all my life
 Shall surely follow me,
 And in God's house forevermore
 My dwelling-place shall be.
 And in God's house forevermore
 My dwelling-place shall be.



A WARM WELCOME!

We are delighted to have you worship with us today.

WORSHIP NOTES

PREACHER

Rev. Emily K. Béghin

LITURGISTS

Rev. Ted Foote

MUSICIANS

Michelle Lassiter, *pianist*

David Kipp, *Director of Music Ministries*

CHANCEL FLOWERS

With thanksgiving to God
for our blessings

by Florence & Bookman Peters

Easter arrangements
by Nicole & Bill McKinley

AUDIO/VIDEO

Emily K. Béghin

COVER ART

"...through the valley of the shadow
of death... thou art with me"

—Psalm 23:4

Photo Credit: Kevin Carden, 2016

COPYRIGHT LICENSES

Hymns from

Glory to God:

The Presbyterian Hymnal

CCLI 196019

OneLicense.net A-718836

CVLI 504246321



THIS WEEK AT FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER, MAY 3

Select Church School Classes-ZOOM

WORSHIP-ONLINE

To view, visit www.fpcbryan.org

5:45pm Youth (GR 6-12) Sunday Fun Day-DIGITAL

(Watch your inbox for details via email!)

MONDAY, MAY 4

TUESDAY, MAY 5

WEDNESDAY, MAY 6

THURSDAY, MAY 7

FRIDAY, MAY 8

SATURDAY, MAY 9

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER, MAY 10

Select Church School Classes-ZOOM

WORSHIP-ONLINE

To view, visit www.fpcbryan.org

5:45pm Youth (GR 6-12) Sunday Fun Day-DIGITAL

(Watch your inbox for details via email!)

For regularly scheduled meetings/gatherings,
please be in touch with your group's
moderator, leader, coordinator, or facilitator
to determine alternate meeting options/platforms.

ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING OFFERING

It's not too late to give to One Great Hour of Sharing Offering.

Gifts will be received through Mother's Day, May 10.

Make your check payable to FPC-Bryan.

MEMO: OGHS (include your giving number, if you know it).

CHURCH WEBSITE

Especially in this time, visit the church website, www.fpcbryan.org,

for the newsletter, announcements, worship bulletins,

devotionals for children and adults, updates, etc.

FACEBOOK

Check for worship, children's activities, Church Joke of the Day, adventures, and more!

Like us on Facebook at: www.facebook.com/FPCBryan

Like us on Facebook at: www.facebook.com/FPC-Bryan-Childrens-Ministry

INSTAGRAM

NEW!!! on Instagram: www.instagram.com:

Search for and follow **fpcbryantx1867** and/or **fpcbryan_youth**

YOUTUBE

Help FPC-Bryan's YouTube channel achieve 400 subscribers to be eligible for a custom url!

366 to go... On www.youtube.com, search for First Presbyterian Church of Bryan, Texas.

Click **SUBSCRIBE**

Our newsletter, **The Chimes**, continues to be available online, emailed to FPC-Bryan friends, and mailed to local FPC-Bryan members with the printed bulletin AND sermon to those without technology. Until further notice, it will not be mailed to its full distribution list. The deadline for the next issue of the newsletter is

NOON, TODAY, and will be distributed on **WEDNESDAY, MAY 6.**

This newsletter will cover news from May 14-27.

STAY CONNECTED! with others in this community of faith at Church Updates—

FPC-Bryan's online tool for church-related announcements, ways to serve,

and current prayer needs. This online tool is "**REAL TIME**," and

users receive a weekly reminder email on Thursdays to view new posts.

Login and create your password-protected account at <https://fpcbtx.churchupdates.org/login>.

For more information, contact Karen in the church office,

979.823.8073 or office@fpcbryan.org.

A Psalm for the Living

Rev. Emily K. Béghin
Psalm 23

May 3, 2020

First Presbyterian Church, Bryan Texas

We all know this beautiful scripture, many of us by heart. So many a time it is posted on greeting cards and bookmarks and trinkets of the like, likely with the scene of a peaceful river. Often it is read to the dying and for the dead, but truly, this is a scripture composed for the living.

I cannot tell you the number of times I have read this at a funeral or a memorial. I simply cannot recall. When I first began my ministry, I was called to visit a dying man. He lay in a bed, in room at the end of a long, white hallway. The soft voices of nurses whispered through the air along my way to see him.

The first time I visited him he asked me to simply sit and read to him from the Bible. He did not want to talk about himself or his life, but just to have me read to him because his eyes had failed him long ago.

Every visit he would wait with a Bible opened to the scripture he wanted to hear. I would sit and I would read, and he would ask what I thought about the scripture. Every week it was this way, new and challenging texts awaited me.

Then, he asked me for the 23rd psalm. I knew it by heart and recited it to him. He grabbed my hand, thanked me for my voice these past many weeks, and told me “God will always be with you, child.” That week he died. It was as though this was not a parting gift to *him*, but rather his parting gift to *me*.

Since that day, this scripture has sat differently on my heart. See, I had heard it so many times that before that day it really had no effect on me. I guess we tend to listen better when we know there won’t be many words to follow what is spoken.

As I have carried this text with me, the images of streams and grass, and sunshine have faded away and something else much deeper has taken their place.

Throughout these past years, different verses have stood out to me. The one I find most striking is, “Yea, though I should walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.”

I used to picture that valley like an apocalyptic scene. Creatures moving in a barren wasteland, contorted, and menacing making their way to a caravan of travelers decked out in steampunk armor, metal respirators like Batman’s Bane, and flame throwers and the like in hand.

This valley, to me, seemed like a futuristic warzone, but now... now that is not what I see.

Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death... the shadow of death that hangs in the air, that lives on the doorknobs and on the hands of those we love, that creeps up in every bill we struggle to pay, every day we go without... the shadow of death that darkens the doors of nursing homes and community centers, that rumbles in the throats of the sick and looms in the hallways of the dying of 50,000, 100,000 deaths of 200,000 deaths... yea though I walk through the valley, this trench in this valley, yes... The shadow looming over me, but will it take me?

What is the shadow of death? What is death? If God and Christ are the way, the truth, and the life, then surely death is the absence of God. Nothing frightens me more than to look into the eyes of another and see nothing in them whether it be a lifeless body or a lifeless soul... eyes devoid of the presence of God no matter how subtle that presence could be... that is death, for there is no light within.

But what then of the human soul, that mixture of darkness and light... Are we equal parts death and life; forces that continually battle one another in this so-called valley?

Where is this place that death looms and makes a shadow, threatening to overcome us, to steal us into the depths of the darkness? Truly, that valley with all its twists and turns and crevices must be something magnificent in size.

Perhaps it lives in the places around us, these pockets and moments of the world we exist within. Maybe it has a grip on our souls within us. Dare we let that shadow extend beyond ourselves to touch others who may walk near to us?

Oh, if only this valley of the shadow of death existed beyond us. If only we could confine it in one place on a map, but then we could avoid this place and that is not the way of this human life. We all must encounter the valley. Each of us exists in this valley together, but we walk different crevices within it.

So how do we get through? Thanks be to the shepherd, my gentle guide, my provider, my caretaker. Because of

my shepherd, I shall never have desire for anything more.

In this ever-flowing river of time and of life, with its currents, white waters, and tumbling places, my shepherd provides me with eddies, places with still waters along the shore that I may rest and find peace as my soul heals before joining the dance of the waters again.

This shepherd is the one who accompanies me into the valley and his rod and his staff, these tools for guidance, they bring me comfort. When the valley lives within us and the death, the things devoid of God, grasp at our hands and our necks, it is the shepherd who can guide us safely to the light.

Thy rod and thy staff, that guiding hand, that calling voice, yea though I walk, you walk with me, you lead me in this valley of uncertainty and of fear. This, a valley of disease, of need, of depression, of anxiety, of abuse, of pride, of loneliness... in this valley and in this shadow that grows with each turn, I shall fear no evil for God is with me and his hand guides me in the ways of goodness; in the ways of righteousness.

Truly, friends, I believe it is the righteous who have the hardest journey through the valley because it is the righteous who are forced to look upon the monsters of death, especially the ones that live within themselves.

It is the righteous who struggle. There are many shepherds, many rods and staffs all hoping to lead us. Which one belongs to God? It is harder to discern this at every turn than to simply hope that because all looks well that this is the right shepherd.

Surely by now we see, this is not a psalm for the dead and the dying. This is a psalm for the living, for the surviving. This is a psalm for the weary traveler, the troubled, the weak and the child within us. We are all these things.

But no, surely not me, not I. No. I am strong. I care for and provide for myself and those around me and I exist with God in a place of thankfulness. No, like a child, I am not. Weak... no. I am strong and able. Surely this psalm is not specifically for me.

Oh, but contrary. It is in times like these when control has escaped our grasps, when uncertainty is more abundant than comfort that we must surrender our interests to God.

God cares for the essence that live within us. There is nothing to make us feel small like conditions that rage on beyond our ability of control. Like a fallen leaf caught

in the twists of a violent tornado, my will cannot beat back the force of these winds to bring me peacefully again to the little tree whence I came.

Every day the news is different. Every day blends with the last. Every day a new and different uncertainty presents itself. We may all be in the same valley, but we all walk different crevices within it.

And yet we all cry out from within our weary souls, our stressed out, wiggled out, worn out souls for a voice of comfort to guide us home again, home, the place of normalcy, the sound of friends' voices undistorted by technology, home the feeling of an embrace and the routine of a schedule.

Home, the time when we can see our families again, when we can plan ahead again, feel purposeful again.

Yea, though I walk, and I may walk aimlessly through the valley of the shadow of death, thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff, thy rod and thy staff... they comfort me, they guide me. They get me through this valley into the land of the light. But who wields such wisdom and power?

Oh, if the noise could only stop in this valley. Between the blame, the anger, the opinions, the frustration, the stupidity, the conflicting answers, and the bewildered professionals... we are all little leaves caught in a swirling tornado.

Make it stop. How do I get out? Make it stop. Just tell me what to do and I will do it because I am lost. Get me out of here. What is this made up choice between life and living? What is this social construct we are in? Is even half of it real or is it in my mind? Who can I trust? Who will guide us rightly out of this valley?

That is a question for the faithful servant a question that sparks the battle of the soul within between the shadows of death that creep into the crevices of our personal valleys and the rays of God's love that pierce the darkness when the clouds might clear.

Only when we empty ourselves of the things that serve our own interests, only when we have fallen to our knees and given up the ornamental loves and desires of our lives, can we see the hands of the shepherd who with great love and a heart of sadness will lead us home, tend to our wounds, and heal our hearts that we may know truth, love, and light forever.

This is a psalm for not for the dead or for the dying, but for the living; the surviving. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. Thanks be to God.