

Easter 4            4/25/21  
Psalm 23:4        B

## I WILL FEAR NO EVIL

When our Lord Christ teaches us to pray, He teaches us to pray these words, “Deliver us from evil.” In his Little Catechism, Martin Luther teaches us these words mean,

“We pray in this petition, in summary, that our Father in heaven would rescue us from every evil of body and soul, possessions and reputation, and finally, when our last hour comes, give us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven” (*Luther’s Small Catechism*, 22).

I call this to your attention because there is this thought that enters our minds, and it is a lie, a dangerous lie, of the devil that goes like this: when you are a Christian, all your troubles go away. And to take that one step further, there are actually lying preachers who will tell you that if you have problems, the problem is you – there must be something wrong with your faith.

Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, this is a downright dangerous lie. David reminds us that on this side of heaven, we “walk through the valley of the shadow of death” and that means evil surrounds our every step.

Which is why, Dear Little Lamb, Jesus teaches us to pray, “Deliver us from evil.” You know all-too-well the evil in the darkness of the valley of the shadow of death. Covid, and cancer and toothache and all manner of disease and infirmity in our mortal bodies. That bump in the night that reminds you you are not in heaven yet; not to mention the rioting, looting, wanton destruction of yours and your neighbor’s property and income. That spouse who once spoke those words, “I do,” but now doesn’t.

Let us never overlook the fact that the evil in the world doesn't work alone. It has a great ally -- your Old Adam, your corrupt and evil nature that you inherit because of Adam's fall into sin (*Luther's Small Catechism*, 214). It's that part of you that causes you to disobey and disrespect authority; to anger, bitterness and hold grudges; to lust, lie, steal and cheat – oh yes, I know the world – this dark world of sin – calls that “looking out for # 1”. Then, there's gossip, envy, jealousy.

And over all of it, is the self-pity that fills your heart and soul; that self-pity that arises over the resentment towards your neighbor for their fame and popularity, because you believe you have been denied the honor that you think you are entitled to. That self-pity that engulfs you because you don't have the toys and stuff your neighbor has, that you think you rightly should have.

What is the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment?

What does this mean?

I call your attention to the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment because this is what this is all about – we are to fear, love, and trust in God above all things. But, we don't. To be sure: we FEAR; not God, as we are called upon to do; but we fear earthly things, circumstances, and situations, because we are not in control; we are not getting our way; things aren't going our way. The Prophet Isaiah speaks the truth of all of us, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned – every one – to his own way” (53:6).

Today, on Good Shepherd Sunday, we once again hear Jesus say, “I am the Good Shepherd” (Jn 10:11). The Good News for us frightened little sheep is that the Good Shepherd knows His sheep. He should, as “very God of very God” He knit you together in your mother's womb. He knows how much you love to wander into sin. He knows how frightened you are in

the dangers and perils of this darkest of valleys. He knows how helpless you are. So, He came, born of virgin mother, to save you from death, the devil, and hell itself.

And He tells you how He does it: “The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep” (v. 11). All those times you went astray from your Shepherd; all the times you turned to your own way; all those times you feared something or someone more than God; all your sin was laid on the shoulders of our Good Shepherd. And He carried all that sin to the cross of Calvary, where He laid down His life as the punishment for it all. Which means, Dear Little Lamb, that you are forgiven. You are washed in the blood of the Lamb, the Lamb of God who takes the sin of the world, so that your wool is white as snow.

Your Good Shepherd laid down His life so that He can take it up again on Easter morning. He rose to give you the forgiveness, the life, and the salvation that He won for you by His suffering, death, and resurrection.

He gave all of that to you when He called you by your name in the waters of Holy Baptism. There, He water and Word, He made you His little lamb and brought you into His pen, the Holy Christian Church, where He feeds you with His grace – that marvelous undeserved, unearned love -- in the hearing of His Word and in the eating and drinking of His Body and Blood.

And that love He gives you is most comforting. His Word says this of the love your Shepherd has for you, “perfect love casts out fear” (1 Jn 4:18). God’s perfect love for you in Jesus Christ drives out fear, so that you can cry in faith, “I will fear no evil”. You can say that because you know God is in control of His creation and your life. Nothing, absolutely nothing, happens by chance in God’s world. He holds you in the palm of His hand,

and Jesus says, "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand" (Jn 10:28).

Which is of great comfort to you, Little Lamb. Remember that lie -- that Christians don't have troubles in the world? That's just what it is -- a lie. In fact, the Bible says just the opposite. The book of Acts reads, "...through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Ac 14:22). Our Shepherd Himself says, "In this world, you will have tribulation" (Jn 16:33). David says bluntly it's "dark". But, you are not alone -- The LORD is your shepherd; He is with you. His rod and His staff, they comfort you. A shepherd had a rod -- a short, heavy club that he would use to drive away predators that wanted to devour his sheep. Your Good Shepherd uses His rod to drive away the wolves when they come to snarl at you with temptations to sin and shame and vice; the lions that want to eat you up with lies like ... God doesn't love you; God doesn't care about you; God isn't with you. And, a shepherd had a staff, that long stick with the hook on one end that he would use to prod the sheep along in the right direction. He would use that hook to untangle a sheep caught in a ticket or rescue a little lamb if they happened to fall into a hole. Your Good Shepherd uses His staff to nudge you along on the paths of righteousness to keep you from straying away and getting lost in error's maize. And, He uses that hook to rescue you from the tribulations and troubles and tears of today. When you fall into hopelessness, anxiety, despair, He lifts you out of it, to put you on His shoulders to carry you home.

Your Good Shepherd will use His rod and staff to comfort you in every evil, and He will rescue you from every evil, even in your final hour, to take you to the green pastures and still waters of heaven.