

# THE FIRST 15

Monday, August 5, 2024

Today is Monday, August 5 and we are studying what the Bible says about preparing a table.

## OPENING PRAYER

*In the morning, as another day begins, I seek the God who loves me. I quiet my mind, slow my breath and still my body. In these calm moments before the events of the day rush in, I listen for the voice of the Shepherd. He is with me. He calls my name, whispers to my soul and guides my steps. Amen.*

## SCRIPTURE

***The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want; he makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies; thou anointest my head with oil, my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for ever. Psalm 23:1-6 (RSV)***

## REFLECTION

We continue our study of the 23rd Psalm. This week we focus on the beginning of the Psalm's fifth verse, "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies." In many parts of the world, the high plateaus of the finest sheep ranges are referred to as "mesas," the Spanish word for "table." A mesa is a flat-topped hill with steep sides. When a shepherd took his flock to the tops of mountains, it was often understood as a "tableland." The shepherd would go to the tableland alone to survey the area and carefully consider the best places for his flock. He would analyze the grass and vegetation and remove any poisonous plants that might harm the sheep. He would look for signs of predators like wolves, coyotes, cougars and bears. He would clear out water holes, check the springs and make sure there was abundant safe drinking water for his flock. You might say, the good shepherd went ahead of the flock to prepare the table for them.

In the same way our Good Shepherd, Jesus, goes ahead to prepare things for us. We trust Him to know what is best for us. Each day, we can rest assured that we are in the care and control of Jesus who has already been all over this territory. He has gone ahead of us into our future, understanding the threats and preparing the way. He has prepared a "table" for us and invited us on a tableland trip for a mountain top experience.

As I begin a new day, I consider the events that lie in front of me. What is scheduled on my calendar for the upcoming day? Who will I meet? Maybe there is something that causes me anxiety or concern. Perhaps I am worried for myself or for someone else. Maybe I am facing an unwanted task or unpleasant chore. Perhaps a challenge awaits me. No matter what the circumstance, large or small, I can invite Jesus to be my help and guide. He has already gone

ahead of me into the course of my day to prepare the best possible outcomes. If only I will be attentive to His guiding, loving presence throughout the course of my upcoming day. If only I will remember to pause and trust Him in every conversation and situation. If only I will remember that He is with me, my Lord and my Shepherd. He has lovingly and thoughtfully prepared today's table and it is set especially for me.

**Ask:** How might I invite Jesus to go ahead of me in the course of my upcoming day and prepare the way? How might I be more attentive to His loving guidance in the hours ahead?

**Pause and Pray**

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

*Blessed Lord Jesus, You are my Savior, guide and friend. You are the Good Shepherd who willingly laid down His life for someone as stubbornly errant and habitually lost as me. Thank You for going ahead of me to prepare the comings and goings of my day. Help me to follow You faithfully. I will endeavor to trust and obey You at every crossroad, step and turn. I relinquish my cares and concerns over the upcoming hours, knowing that You have already scoped out the territory and know the best way to go. Amen.*

(This First 15 was inspired by the book: *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, by W. Phillip Keller)