

THE FIRST 15

Thursday, August 8, 2024

Today is Thursday, August 8 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

You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!" See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young. Isaiah 40:9-11

REFLECTION

Isaiah compares God to a shepherd tending His flock. He gently leads the sheep. He carries the young lambs close to His heart. He watches over them with loving care. He is ready to protect them from harm. God is a powerful protector. God grieves with us in our pain, sorrow and loss, but like a shepherd with a rod and staff, God also guides us and fights off any predators that would harm us. In the 23rd Psalm, the Psalm writer proclaims, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies." I imagine entering a room filled with enemies. There is a banquet table laid with china, crystal and silver. God invites me to be seated at the place of honor. An abundant feast is prepared for me to share with Him - and I dine right in front of my enemies. I am not afraid. This is a celebration of victory. The threat has turned into a triumph. I dine in the presence of my enemies.

Sheep almost always eat in the presence of enemies. Out on the green meadows of the remote high country, bears, wolves, and coyotes are always lurking about looking for prey. A sheep must trust the shepherd to protect him so that he can graze safely despite pending dangers. In my daily life, I walk in the presence of enemies. I would be wise to walk a little closer to Christ. That is a place of assured safety. Most often it is the distant sheep, the wanderer, the roamer that becomes the target of a predator. The same is true for Christians. Many of us wander and get off course. We get ourselves into difficulties and are unaware of our adversary's attack. Peter describes the devil as a roaring lion. He says, "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

Our Shepherd wants us to be safe. If we walk a little closer to Him each day, if we spend time reading scripture, spend time in prayer, walk with Him and talk with Him, trust Him and follow Him, we are likely to remain safe and avoid all sorts of troubles and dangers. The Holy Spirit will

be near at hand, whisper directions, nudge and guide us in the way we should go. The Good Shepherd gently leads us and even carries us when we need carrying. He carries us close to His heart.

Ask: What might I list as an “enemy” that I am up against today? How might God want to nourish me in the presence of my enemies and keep me safe?

Pause and Pray

CLOSING PRAYER

Holy and loving Lord, you are the Shepherd of my soul. Thank You for loving me, gently guiding me and holding me close to Your heart. Help me to walk very near You and stay close to your side. Lead me in the way I should go. Prepare places for me throughout my upcoming day - places where I can pause and rest and nourish myself in Your sweet love. Amen.

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