Communion Meditation – "Jolly, Lovely, Always on Time"
Scripture Reading – Psalm 23
Sunday, May 11, 2025
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Psalm 23 is our Scripture reading for today. This beloved and well-known psalm portraying Yahweh as the Shepherd and the Host has provided sustenance and strength to people of faith throughout the generations.

Christians appropriately hear Psalm 23 in relation to Jesus, who in John 10 said, "I am the good shepherd;" who, as gracious host, invites us to eat and drink at his table; whose name Emmanuel means "God is with us;" and who gave his life for the healing of the sins as the "Lamb of God." (Texts for Preaching, Year C; Dr. Clint McCann)

As we celebrate those who brought us into the world and nurtured us along the paths of our lives on this Mother's Day, one cannot help but see parallels in the roles of our Shepherd God and our shepherd moms. Hear now God's holy word:

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. God makes me lie down in green pastures; and leads me beside still waters. God restores my soul…and leads me in right paths for God's name sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint 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 forever. Amen.

The title of the meditation: "Jolly, Lovely, Always on Time"

Let us pray. Holy and loving God, thank you for the richness of the shepherd metaphor which captures your steadfast presence and nurture in each of our lives and for the shepherd moms among us. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. Amen.

Jolly, lovely, always on time… these are a few of the phrases our son, Paul, chose to describe his mom in an elementary school poem which was posted on the refrigerator in our Clayton home until our move to Springfield in 2013. The Kieffer family had a few chuckles about the phrase *always on time* over the years because I was known for being the last mom to pick Paul up from the early childhood center…sometimes a few minutes past the pick-up time which cost us a dollar a minute.

An older, working mom, when we welcomed Paul into the world, I consistently tried to squeeze in one more task before leaving for the day. Paul was always happy to see me and never complained. Peter and I wondered if Paul thought saying it would make it so or maybe Paul was not thinking of being on time in a literal sense.

I recently came across a song by Elevation Worship, a contemporary Christian worship music collection affiliated with Elevation Church based in Charlotte, North Carolina. The song titled

Always on Time expresses gratitude and faith in God's presence and support, especially during difficult times. The lyrics highlight the believer's trust in God's ability to guide and deliver them through life's challenges. The phrase "always on time," emphasizes God's unwavering presence and support in all situations and affirms that even when God seems delayed or absent, God is always on time. Listen to the lyrics:

I remember how You provided, how You held me through the night.
And I remember how You sustained me, when you stepped in to save my life.

Jesus, I was tossed in the water, but I never went under. You were always on time.
Jesus, when I went through the fire, you were right there beside me. You were always on time

I remember how You carried me When I couldn't take a step
And I remember how You loved me when I couldn't love myself.

There's never been a day, never been a minute, Never been a moment that You weren't in it.
There's never been a time that You didn't see me through, O God, I worship You.

In so many ways these lyrics echo the affirmation of God's nurture and steadfast love in the Shepherd metaphor of Psalm 23, *even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me*, You are always on time!

People do not make the connection and express gratitude for God's presence in their lives without those who nurture faith and spiritual development within them or those who model God's presence and timeliness in their young lives.

In 2015, Dr. Lisa Miller, a Professor at Columbia University, wrote a New York Times Bestseller book entitled The Spiritual Child. She combines more than a decade of cutting-edge scientific research with broad anecdotal evidence from her work as a clinical psychologist to illustrate just how essential spirituality is to a child's physical and mental health. The research shows that children who are nurtured in spirituality are 40% less likely to use and abuse substances, 60% less likely to be depressed as teenagers, and 80% less likely to have dangerous or unprotected sex.

Dr. Miller contends that parents who nurture their child's spirituality provide an essential foundation on which to build their young lives.

On this Mother's Day, as we honor the women who brought us into the world and did their best to nurture our wellbeing, whether they were always on time or not, let us give thanks for all the moms, role models, and mentors in our lives who have shepherded our faith providing a spiritual foundation and for the God who is always on time over all of time

In the *green pastures, still waters,* and *right paths* of our lives, we have known tranquility, rest, averted danger, and the sanctuary of home. In *thy rod* and *thy staff*, instruments for guidance, redirection, and setting boundaries, not tools for corporal punishment, we have found strength and received insight along the way. However, none of our lives is without disappointment, miss-steps, water, fire, or betrayal, therefore it is God who *restores our soul*. The lamb of God repairs, mends, reinstates, and forgives us, and the Shepherd God sustains us even through the darkest valley.

Today we gather at the table prepared by our Savior, the Lamb of God, who like a shepherd leads us, and we give thanks for the moms who have led us along green pastures, beside still

waters, in right paths, and through the darkest valley; the moms who have made us who we are today and who call us to be all we can be.

Today we give thanks for the reservoir of spiritual confidence we have received because of the tender care given and the wisdom shared, because of the disappointment, restoration, and redirection along the way, and because we belong to the God who is always on time.

6Surely goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our lives, and we shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen.