

Communion Meditation – “Shepherd Mom”  
Scripture Reading – Psalm 23  
Sunday, May 12, 2019  
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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. Both metaphors proclaim the same radical message – life depends completely on God. In God’s steadfast and abundant presence “I shall not want.” and “My cup overflows.”

The childlike trust articulated in Psalm 23 recalls Jesus’ words in Mark 10 about entering the realm of God “as a little child.” 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)

Hear now God’s holy word:

*The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.*

*<sup>2</sup> God makes me lie down in green pastures;  
and leads me beside still waters<sup>d</sup>*

*<sup>3</sup> God restores my soul...and leads me in right paths for the sake of God’s name.*

*<sup>4</sup> 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.*

*<sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies;  
you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.*

*<sup>6</sup> 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 Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

The title of the meditation: “Shepherd Mom”

*The text: You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Psalm 23:5*

Let us pray.

Loving Shepherd and Lamb of God, thank you for the richness of the shepherd metaphor which captures your steadfast presence and nurture in each of our lives. Thank you for the moms who shepherd us. As we reflect on Scripture in preparation for a seat at your table, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. Amen.

The term “Tiger Mom” was coined by Yale Law School professor Amy Chua in her 2011 memoir Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother. A “tiger mom” is a strict and demanding parent who pushes and pressures her children to attain high levels of academic achievement or success in high-status extracurricular activities such as music, using authoritarian parenting methods. The caricature of the “tiger mom” is a Chinese mother who relentlessly drives her child to study hard, to the detriment of the child’s social and physical development, and emotional well-being.

The Tiger Mom, by overemphasizing one area of development, inadvertently compromises the other three. The four areas or domains of child development traditionally have been identified as physical, social, emotional, and cognitive.

However, in 2015 a Professor at Columbia University, Dr. Lisa Miller, 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 have a positive, active relationship to 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 defines spirituality as a personal relationship to a high power such as nature, God, spirit or the universe that is loving and guiding. She contends that parents who nurture their child’s spirituality within their particular faith tradition are providing an essential foundation on which to build their young lives.

On this Mother’s Day (weekend) I would submit that Psalm 23 provides a model for parenting that honors the physical, social, cognitive, emotional *and spiritual* domains within a child’s life. I am hoping to coin the term, if only for a day, Shepherd Mom.

There are many parallels between the work of the shepherd and the work of the mom. The shepherd provides for the basic necessities of life. “Green pastures” and “still waters” suggest tranquility, security, and rest; however, they also suggest food and drink. For a sheep, to be led in “right paths” means that danger is averted and proper shelter is attained. Thus the shepherd provides food, drink, and a home.

Along with the essential physical needs that are given, we learn from the psalmist there is also a restorative and healing nature to the shepherd’s care. “Thou restoreth my soul.” To restore is to repair, fix, mend, refurbish, reinstate, forgive. None of our lives is without disappointment, miss-steps, or betrayal. The shepherd understands this and rejoices when one of the ninety-nine is found and restored to the community.

As Mary Catherine Bateson writes in her book Composing a Life. *When there is a rent in the canvas, a discord in the harmony, it is important not only to recover but to discover a new and inclusive pattern of meaning. Part of the task of composing a life is the artist’s need to find a way to take what is simply ugly and instead of trying to deny it, to use it in the broader, restored design.*

This insight and sense of well-being, this inner emotional strength grows out of the shepherd’s care, which sustains the psalmist even through the darkest valley. “I fear no evil for thou art with me.” A confidence in the shepherd’s presence remains even when darkness prevents one

from seeing the shepherd. This spiritual strength brings us through the long, dark night to see the light of a clear blue morning and a new day dawning. (pause)

The rod and the staff that provide comfort to the sheep are not tools for corporal punishment; rather, they are instruments for guidance, redirection, and setting boundaries. The strength and consistency of this guidance and boundary-setting is both comforting and empowering. The psalmist affirms that the care given is for the sake of the shepherd's name or in other words, this care is born out of the fundamental character of who the shepherd is.

The metaphor of the shepherd moves to the metaphor of hospitality in verse five of Psalm 23 as the table is set (in the presence of one's enemies) and the head is anointed. The gracious host does for the guest what the shepherd does for the sheep—and what a “Shepherd Mom” does for her children.

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 those shepherd moms who have led us along the green pastures, beside the 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 by our moms and mentors, because of the disappointment, restoration, and redirection along the way, and because we belong to the Shepherd, the Lamb of God, who is our strength, who picks us up, and who fills our cup.

*<sup>6</sup>Surely goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our lives, and we shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever. Amen.*