

EASTER: IN FAITH WE CELEBRATE NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

**Fourth Sunday of Easter
(Good Shepherd Sunday)
April 29, 2007**

**Acts 9:36-43
Psalm 23
Revelation 7:9-17
John 10:22-30**

The Shepherd and the Lamb

In his teachings, Jesus was always clear about what was considered most important in discipleship: love God, love each other. The corollary for loving God is loving those whom God made in his image (1 John 4:20,21).

Shortly after his resurrection, Jesus appears to the disciples and shares a meal (John 21.1-19). After the meal, Jesus asks Simon Peter, “Do you love me more than the others do?” To which Peter, the one who had denied Jesus during his trial, replies, “Yes, Lord, you know I do!” Three times Jesus asks Peter this question, and each time Peter is more emphatic in his vow of love. To each response, Jesus challenges Peter to “feed my lambs” and “feed my sheep.” In essence, Jesus was preparing Peter for the job as shepherd.

During his ministry, Jesus had told those around him, “I am the good shepherd, and the good shepherd gives up his life for his sheep” (John 10:11, *CEV*). Had not Christ proven that he was indeed the “good shepherd” by giving his life for those he loved?

Jesus’ lesson was not lost on Peter. In fact, Peter exhibited a newfound boldness after the resurrection. This disciple, this sheep, who had showed signs of confusion and timidity while Jesus was being tried and ultimately crucified, was now the spokesperson for those new Christians on the day of Pentecost as the early church emerged (Acts 2:14-28). It was Peter that the people sent for when the philanthropist Dorcas died (Acts 9:36-43). She was, in fact, part of that flock of “sheep” Jesus had asked Peter to feed. And, in ways reminiscent of Jesus (Mark 5:40-42), Peter raises Dorcas from death.

How remarkable that a once errant sheep could now be entrusted with the responsibilities of shepherding! This week’s Psalm reminds us that Jesus, our shepherd, meets our needs and provides an indescribable tranquility and a bounty of blessings that make even the threat of death dissipate (Psalm 23:4). How like the “good shepherd” to make the ultimate provision for us! “My sheep know my voice, and I know them. They follow me,

and I give them eternal life, so that they will never be lost. No one can snatch them out of my hand” (John 10:27,28 CEV).

As we look back at Easter, we are confronted with the image of Christ not as the gentle shepherd, but as the Paschal Lamb who though “wounded and crushed because of our sins,” remained “silent like a lamb being led to the butcher” (Isaiah 53:7, CEV). A reversal of roles – a role Christ took upon himself to fulfill Scripture and to pay the penalty for humankind’s sin. Yet, as we look ahead expectantly to Christ’s second coming, we get an apocalyptic glimpse of Christ enthroned, the object of everlasting worship by those who “have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb” (Revelation 7:14b, CEV). There we see in glorious majesty “the *Lamb* in the center of the throne” who “will be their *shepherd*. He will lead them to streams of life-giving water” (Revelation 7:17, CEV).

May Christ our shepherd, the Lamb of God, find us worthy of being his disciples and may we in obedience, feed his sheep.

This week’s Reflection was prepared by Dorette Saunders, who serves on the staff of the American Bible Society as Senior Research Editor in the Education Unit of the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship.

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Singapore – With thanks to God that the Scriptures are now available on cassette, CD, and in MP3 format, and with prayers for more workers and resources to meet the Scripture needs in Brunei; **Malaysia** – With thanks to God for new opportunities to promote the use of Scripture in the national language—Bahasa Malaysia, and with prayers for effective distribution of the Bible in Bahasa Malaysia to all Malaysians; **Thailand** – With thanks to God for the successful launch of the Revised Thai Pentateuch, and with prayers for good progress on the rest of the Old Testament and for the ability to improve the translation tools and typesetting process; **Myanmar** – With thanks to God for the publication of the Myanmar Common Language Bible and for five other translation projects that have been completed, and with prayers for eighteen other translation projects.

Activity Corner: “The LORD Is My Shepherd” Booklet (for young children)

Supplies needed: Bible; 8-1/2” x 11” construction paper (assorted colors); 8” x 10” writing paper; 3-hole puncher and ribbon or brass fasteners (or stapler); pens or pencils; glue or paste; scissors; old magazines.

Invite children in your household to copy each of the six verses from Psalm 23 onto six pieces of writing paper. Look through magazines for pictures that illustrate each of the six verses and paste the pictures on sheets of construction paper. Use two sheets of construction paper for the front and back covers. Write “The LORD Is My Shepherd” on the cover and decorate with artwork or pictures from a magazine. Gather the pages in order and use a 3-hole puncher to make aligned holes on the left-hand side of the sheets.

Fasten the pages together with ribbon or brass fasteners (or staple the pages). Encourage the children to use their booklets to help them memorize this beloved psalm.

“Shepherd” Word Game

Supplies needed: writing paper; pens or pencils; timer or stopwatch.

Invite members of your household to write down as many words as they can, using the letters from the word “Shepherd.” Time limit: 10 minutes

(Suggested words: deep; deer; heed; her; herd; here; peer; red; reed; seed; seep; she; shed; sheep; sheer)

Conclude by reading Psalm 23 together as a closing prayer and discuss how God is like a shepherd in caring for each of us.