

## **Who's Your Shepherd?**

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Confirmation Sunday

*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 right paths for his name's 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 my whole life long.  
--Psalm 23*

I want to congratulate each of you first of all for taking this very important step.

I also want to point out some of the risks.

You may not realize just how significant confirming your baptism may be at this point.

But this could be the most dangerous step you will ever take. That's right, I said dangerous. Confirming your baptism is dangerous business. You will follow a path which is so dangerous that your only source of comfort will be the shepherd you follow. In confirming your baptism you have agreed to give your life to something larger than yourself. In baptism we are marked as Christ's own forever, and when you confirm your baptism you are saying in response, "Yes, I do belong to Christ. I do not belong to myself, to my parents, to anyone, except Christ whom alone I will follow."

**So why is following Christ a risky and dangerous journey?**

Christ may lead you to places that you might never think of going by yourself. They may be physical places. Perhaps a homeless shelter or a hospital. Maybe another country. Maybe your neighboring nursing home. Or Christ may lead you to spiritual places. Places in your own soul and heart—where Christ shows you who you are as a person. Maybe Christ will not lead you to a place but to a person or to many persons. You may not know what to say or do until you meet them. Maybe these people will be your teachers. Maybe you will be their teacher. These places and people will be risky and dangerous, because Christ seems to enjoy taking people beyond their comfort zones. You never know what might happen. You never know how you might be changed. That is the danger. With danger comes triumph.

### **Where will Christ take you?**

No one can answer that for you. The scripture text you have chosen might give you some hints. You have chosen for your scripture text the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. It is a text about being led. You lead me beside still waters and into green pastures, says the psalmist. Still waters and green pastures make a peaceful scene. Following Christ can result in deep peace—a peace that passes understanding. In the midst of life's chaos, Christ is your peace. You will need to spend time at those places of still waters. Through prayer, worship, and meditation you will nourish your soul. You will need that comfort, peace, and nourishment because Christ will also lead you to places that are not so peaceful.

Christ will lead you down right paths or paths of justice. You will have to make choices—should I follow Christ down this path of justice? It is risky. Maybe there is an easier way—an easier path. And there usually is an easier path. But most often the right thing to do is not the easy thing to do. The easy path is not Christ's path. But you have been comforted at the still waters. Your shepherd is with you. You will follow Christ down that path.

Sometimes the path will be covered by a dark shadow. Shadows of grief, loss and suffering. But Christ will be there.

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you are with me.”

If there is one thing for certain in this life, it is that we will all go to our death. We even say that our baptism is not complete until our death. It is a lifelong journey. But even death will not separate us from the love of God. So live each day prepared to die, and die as one who goes on to live.

Many people have taken this journey before you. Everyone in this congregation is on this journey as well. Get to know your fellow-travelers. Let everyone be your teacher.

I am honored that each of you has been my teacher and that we are on this journey together. In our journey...

There will be still waters and there will be dark valleys. There will be mistakes and failures and there will be forgiveness and joy. There will be banquets and there will be times of hunger. There will be enemies who Christ will urge you to love into friends. And at your journey's end, there will be home—and a life well-lived—a risky, dangerous life that was worth every step.