

FUNERAL SERMON
In Loving Memory of Grace Osher
(1905-2003)
Grace Lutheran Church
Fairmont, Minnesota
Dr. Rick Bartosik, Pastor, Mililani Community Church
August 4, 2003

NOTE: This sermon was read by Rev. Steve Witmer, Associate Pastor of Bethel Evangelical Free Church of Fairmont, Minnesota.

Our hearts go out to all of you today, as you gather to remember a beloved mother, grandmother, great-grandmother and friend. Grace has been a large part of our family's life for the past twenty years; and we are sorry that circumstances did not permit us to be with you personally today. All of Grace's many friends in Hawaii send their love to you. The staff at Bible Institute of Hawaii asked me to tell you their prayers are with you today.

How wonderful to know that at this moment Grace is rejoicing in the presence of the Lord! The Bible assures us that for a child of God, "to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord."

Diane and I first met Grace on a trip to China in 1983, led by Bible Institute of Hawaii founder Rev. Don Baron. Grace was grieving the recent loss of her beloved husband, and Diane had just learned that she was pregnant with our son David. Diane was experiencing morning sickness every day. The Lord brought the two of them together to comfort and encourage each other – and Grace has been a precious friend ever since!

Rod Franklin, the former director of Bible Institute of Hawaii once said, "Having Grace in your home is like having the Ark of the Covenant in your home!" And we agree! Grace has immeasurably enriched our lives as the love of Jesus has shined from her life to our family and to all who have known her.

Faith, thank you so much for sharing your mom with people around the world! Grace traveled to Japan five times on missionary adventures, when she was in her 80s and legally blind! But God used that blindness and her age as instruments for His glory as she was invited into the homes of Buddhist families, where she had a powerful impact for Christ. Her life has left a lasting legacy to the glory of God.

I understand that Joy Beth was at her side reading the Twenty-third Psalm when she passed peacefully into the presence of her Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Today I would like you to join me in considering some of the wonderful truths we find in this great Psalm. The promises of Psalm 23 are for all who have trusted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. They are his sheep. He is their Shepherd. Jesus said, *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any one pluck them out of my hand"* (John 10:27-28).

Grace was one of those precious sheep. She trusted Him as her Savior and became part of his flock. Therefore the promises of this Psalm apply to her. They remind us of the Lord's care for her as well as His care for each of us who belong to Him by faith.

Notice that this Psalm starts in a very straightforward manner with the simple words, *"The LORD is my shepherd. . . "*

"LORD" is emphatic. It is the Lord who makes our faith distinctive. No other person fits. The LORD is my shepherd. The promises of this Psalm are not for everyone in general. These promises can only be claimed by those who can say with David, *"the LORD is my shepherd"*.

The word "my" personalizes the relationship and makes it close and intimate. *"The LORD is MY shepherd."*

Finally, the word "shepherd" is the most comprehensive and intimate metaphor in the Psalms. A shepherd lived with his flock and meant everything to it. He was its guide, its physician, and its protector.

When David says, *"I shall not want"* he means all the deepest longings of his heart are met in a personal relationship with the LORD.

Let's reflect for a few moments on four wonderful promises that the LORD has given to all who know Him as their Shepherd

FIRST: HE PROMISES REST. Beginning in verse 2 we read: *"He makes me to lie down in green pastures: He leads me beside the still waters, he restores my soul."*

An experienced shepherd once explained that because of their nature it is almost impossible for sheep to be made to lie down unless four requirements are met: **FIRST**, they are so timid that they refuse to lie down unless they are free from all fear. **SECOND**, because of their social behavior within a flock, sheep will not lie down unless they are free from friction with others of their kind. **THIRD**, if tormented by flies or parasites, sheep will not lie down. Only when they are free of these pests can they relax. **FOURTH**, sheep will not lie down as long as they feel in need of finding food. They must be free from hunger.

The same is true of people. Jesus says to restless, discontented, agitated and fearful people: *"Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and you shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."* Matt. 11:28-30.

As the Good Shepherd, Jesus not only promises REST but ...
SECONDLY: HE PROMISES GUIDANCE. In verse 3 we read, *"He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake."*

No other class of livestock requires more careful handling, more detailed direction, or more guidance than sheep. If they are left to themselves they tend to go astray in various ways. That must be the reason why people are so often described in the Bible as sheep. We prefer to follow our own fancies and turn to our own ways. We are stiff-necked and rebellious. Isaiah 53:6 says, *"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way"*

Turning to "my own way" simply means doing what I want rather than what God wants. We do this deliberately, repeatedly even to our own self-destruction. Proverbs 14:12 says, *"There is a way which seems right to a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."*

To people with broken hearts, and broken lives, to people who have gone astray, Jesus says, *"I am come that you might have life and have it more abundantly."*

He wants us to put ourselves in his all-powerful and all-wise hands, and he will guide us out of the pathways of sin and into paths of righteousness.

THIRDLY: HE PROMISES HIS PERSONAL PRESENCE, even in the face of great danger. In verse 4 we read: *"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me."*

We find such comfort in the knowledge that He knows us and loves us and He is always with us. We don't have to be shaken up and frightened and panicked by the storms of life. The promise of His continual presence and protection overcomes all our fears, when we take Him at His word. One of our worst fears is the fear of death. Death can come so suddenly and unexpectedly, as it does for many.

But when we know Jesus as our shepherd we don't have to be afraid of death. JESUS SAID, *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."*

What did Jesus mean by these words? This means that the moment Grace put her trust in Jesus as her Savior she became the partaker of a life that will never end. From that moment on she belonged to the Lord and she will never be separated from him. Death for Grace (and for every believer) simply means to depart and be with Christ!

This brings us to the fourth and final point. He not only promises REST and GUIDANCE and His PERSONAL PRESENCE in all the circumstances of life ...

FOURTHLY: HE PROMISES A HEAVENLY HOME. In the final verse of this Psalm we read, *"Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever."*

The word "mercy" here is the Hebrew word HESED. HESED refers to God's loyal, unfailing, unconditional love. This love is hard for us to comprehend because human love so frequently has mixed motives.

To be loved with God's loyal, unfailing, unconditional love means that even though He knows everything there is to know about us, God still loves us. Even though we stand totally exposed before Him, He fully accepts us.

When we learn to accept this unconditional love, we are able to love ourselves, which is the foundation for self-worth. Then we are free to love other people, which is the basis for friendships, marriage, and a fulfilled family life. Grace loved people so much because she was so much in love with her Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Romans 5:8 speaks of this wonderful love: *"God demonstrated his own love for us in this, that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us."* Those who respond to God's love have the assurance of an eternal home in heaven. Death is no longer something to fear, because with David we can say, *"I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever!"*

In the heart of all who know the Good Shepherd, there is a longing. Our longing is for that great and final home which the Lord Jesus Christ has Himself gone to prepare for us. He has said, *"I go to prepare a place for you. And If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there you may be also."* We are sad because Grace has died. But the Lord is glad, because she is FINALLY HOME! Home in Heaven with the LORD she loved and served so faithfully here on earth. Home to hear Him say, *"Well done, good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of your Lord."*

I had the privilege for many years of serving as chaplain for the Hawaii State Prison. Grace often came into the prison with us on Sundays, when she was in Hawaii, and she sat right in the front row of the chapel. She loved the men there and they loved her. In the early days of my ministry in the prison, I met a man named George Mia. George had been in and out of trouble since he was a boy. He was in a Boy's Home by the age of nine. Eventually he ended up in prison. He was a troublemaker in prison and ended up in solitary confinement. There, in what the inmates called "the hole," he recalled the words to Psalm 23 – which he had apparently learned as a little boy in a Sunday School. With a stubby pencil, he wrote out Psalm 23 on the wall of his cell. Then with nothing better to do, he meditated on those words ... *"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. . . "* He thought to himself, "Goodness and mercy have not followed me. I haven't been good to others. I have been mean. And they have shown me no mercy. But Lord, if that is what you offer, I want it." Right there in his cell, he got down on his knees and invited Christ into his life! The Bible says, *"If any man be in Christ he is a new creation, old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."* George became a new creation that day. He has been out of prison now for more than 20 years. God has been good to George. He has a Christian wife, a job and a church family. Like Grace, his life was transformed when He placed his trust in Christ.

Grace is in heaven now with her Lord. But if she could speak to this assembled congregation today I believe she would invite each one of you to put your faith in the living Christ. Some of you already have. But if you have not, I invite you to make that commitment today. What more fitting time to do it than at a service to honor one whose life is a great testimony to the difference Christ can make. Inviting Christ into your life is as simple as ABC. **A** – Admit that you are a sinner in the sight of a holy God. **B** – Believe that God loves you and sent His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to pay the full penalty for all your sin. **C** – Come to Him, just as you are with your load of sin, and ask Him to save you! And He will! He promised: *"All that the Father gives me will come to me; and whoever comes to me I will never cast out."* Why not come to Him today! Trust Him as your personal Savior today! God bless all of you, and God comfort each member of the family with His love.