



# FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

## “LEAVE IT TO YOUR SHEPHERD”

Scripture Lesson: Psalm 23

*This sermon was preached by Nic Tuemler on Youth Sunday, February 3, 2019  
at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.*

### Psalm 23

A Psalm of David.

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.

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Hi congregation, my name is Nic and I'm glad to be here today seeing many familiar faces and many more that I hope to get to know. Each year, in preparation for this day, we youth meet to choose the theme for the upcoming Youth Sunday. This year to my genuine surprise, the youth group chose my idea of "sheep" for this year's theme. Now, depending on how you react to my sermon, I may regret telling you that, but let's hope for the best.

When I thought about sheep in the Bible, one passage stuck out to me and that was Psalm 23. Now you may be saying, Nic of course you thought of that one, that's about the easiest passage on sheep you could've picked, but hear me out. I want to spend this time that I have with you to really get deep into what I find interesting about this passage and hopefully, in the end, give you a new view or confirm a previous view that you may have had about this Psalm.

Among the things that this Psalm hits on, that I really want to highlight, is something that generally isn't fun to talk about and that is the bad times. When I read Psalm 23, what I see is more than sheep mindlessly following their shepherd. Instead, I see a person who has complete faith in God because, in my eyes, this is a Psalm of unending faith. I see a roller coaster in this Psalm.

It begins by describing the still waters that are like the slow march along with everyone else before getting on the ride, smooth and steady with the path ahead clearly laid out, you still feel like you have control. As the Psalm continues, control evaporates while trust becomes central. When you get on a roller coaster you are saying that you have trust. You trust that the ride won't go too fast, that your restraints are firm and that you are going to go around once, then exit with no harm done. Trust is an easy thing to do at an amusement park like Disney or Universal, but it is much harder to apply to our lives.

When we go through our days we have worries. One person can never fully understand the stresses that another person goes through on a daily basis, nor can one person say that their burden is any more cumbersome than another's. I may not know what stresses you in the congregation have, but I know right now that my main stress these days is homework and how much of the money I earn from my part-time job goes to gas and mac & cheese. Such little things like these are in my control though. They are things that I can do something about, be proactive with and fix, or change.

The scariest things, and the ones that I struggle with the most, however, are things that are out of my control. So far the scariest thing that has happened in my life is not something that happened to me, but what happened to my mom. In October of 2017, my mom was diagnosed with breast cancer. The worst feeling is one of helplessness for the ones you hold closest to you. I was mad; I was irrational; I didn't think it was possible. My mom, the healthiest person I know, was suddenly in a position that was life threatening and I could do nothing to change that. This wasn't a roller coaster that I got on willingly and waited in line for with a grin on my face. I didn't know how to feel. I had just been put in the back seat of a speeding car that no one was driving. Or so I thought for the first month of chemo and the pains that come with it.

I have nothing but respect for my mom who stayed strong for us and involved in our lives while she underwent pain that I can't imagine. As her treatment continued and the more I read Psalm 23, the more I felt I might be wrong about that speeding car I was in. The line that stuck out to me the most was "though I walk through the shadow of the valley of death I will fear no evil; for you are with me." At some point, I realized that I was no longer alone in that runaway car. Reading and rereading this psalm made me realize something. Some things are out of your control. It sounds so simple. Seven words. Seven words that made me realize I was not, nor would ever be alone, because with me is someone who is in control. And the more I turned control over and trusted in God, the more peace I began to feel. I gave it to God. I gave all of my fear and anger and sadness to him. It worked wonders. Suddenly I was not just stuck in this rut of self-pity and misery, but could be the supporting son that my mom needed me to be in her time of struggle. I gave God my doubts and my expectations. And it worked. I felt relief because I knew that no matter how things went, it was in God's hands. I genuinely feel that God listened and my mom is now in full remission more than a year since her diagnosis. I finally hit the end

of the roller coaster and came out the other side. I felt goodness and mercy following me and I came out of the valley knowing that God had listened to my prayers and stayed with my family throughout the journey.

If there is anything that I want you to take out of this sermon today, it is that you should never feel that you have no one to turn to. Not only will there be great people in the community, like Mr. James, but there will always be God, your shepherd, there to take your troubles and guide you through. We may not be sheep, but God treats us as the shepherd that we all need guiding us along paths of righteousness.



# FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

## “BE A SHEPHERD”

Scripture Lesson: Matthew 25:32-46

*This sermon was preached by Manning Unger on Youth Sunday, February 3, 2019  
at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.*

### **Matthew 25:32-46**

All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” Then he will say to those at his left hand, “You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.” Then they also will answer, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?” Then he will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.” And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.’

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Well... It’s been a few years since I’ve been up here at the pulpit. In fact, I’m sure you’ve all noticed I’ve grown a good foot or two since then. But more of you would notice a different change, one that you all enjoy pointing out to me every Sunday as I walk into church. Truly, I have not cut my hair since the last time I gave a sermon. Now, some of you would tell me the hairstyle looks good on me. Others, however, would tell me quite the opposite. My parents, I can assure you, belong to that faction. Luckily for me, God doesn’t appear to judge people on their hair. Instead, as we see in Matthew Chapter 25, with a depiction of Judgement Day, he separates the entire world into two separate lines. One of these lines is commended for having provided God with food when he was hungry, water when he was thirsty, and clothes when his

own were ragged. The other line suffers a different fate. They are told that they ignored God when he was hungry, thirsty, and in ragged clothing on the streets. Each group then asks how they could have possibly fed or ignored God had they never seen him. To each of these, God responds with a powerful message, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." In this sense, God means that whatever one does for other people, in particular the most helpless, one does for God himself.

Throughout the Bible, "the least of these" are frequently compared to sheep. In fact, in Ezekiel Chapter 34, the needy are elaborately compared to a flock of sheep without a shepherd. Unlead and uncared for, these sheep wander off and become prey to the world. God, thus, asks us to be the shepherd for the untended flock. Now, this metaphorical flock of needy sheep can be seen in almost every aspect of life, but where we see them almost every day is in those who do not own a home. Every time we go shopping on King Street or look under the Ravenel Bridge, we see these tragically scattered sheep. Unfortunately, we tend to look away from them and pretend they aren't there. But that isn't what God calls us to do. He wants us to give them food, because they are hungry, or give them water, because they are thirsty. But, sometimes we don't have anything spare to give them, or are scared to give anything to them thinking that they will put any of our money to bad use.

Well, over the summer, I along with many members of the High School youth, went on a mission trip to San Francisco. Over there, most of our time was spent dealing with the homeless, and what we found was that we didn't have to give them anything but our time and attention. When we actually sat down and talked to them, they transformed into real people. In fact, I especially remember a conversation with one man I met on the sidewalk named Thomas. He had spent the entire day sitting there and being ignored by every single passerby - a group of friends and I were the first who had taken notice to him that entire day. What struck me most about my interaction with Thomas, though, was the impact I had by simply acknowledging that he was there. I didn't have to give him food, or water, or clothes, or money, I could just be his shepherd by talking to him. In fact, all this gave me a different outlook on the homeless living within our own community. I came to realize that behind every person on the street is someone who just wanted to be recognized by the people around us. All we have to do to be their shepherd is to just acknowledge that they are there.



# FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

## “LEAVING THE 99”

Scripture Lesson: Luke 15:4-7

*This sermon was preached by Mills Jordan on Youth Sunday, February 3, 2019  
at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.*

### **Luke 15:4-7**

‘Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbours, saying to them, “Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.” Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who need no repentance.

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“Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it?” The idea of being the lost sheep has related to me at multiple points in my life and even recently in the last few days. For example, last Saturday I felt like a lost sheep when I realized that I had successfully procrastinated for two weeks on writing this sermon and that it was due for rehearsal the next day. I can barely keep up with it in school, and now James is giving me homework too? - talk about feeling lost. I’m only kidding about being lost there, but truthfully, I really have felt like the lost sheep at times in my life.

Last year in my freshman year of high school, I really was a lost sheep at many times. On my new soccer team, I was much less experienced than my teammates and felt lost, but my teammates reached out to train with me on weekends to help me improve. The first week of school I knew no one and literally was lost looking for my classes, but kind upperclassmen greeted me and helped me find where I needed to be.

Later in the summer following my freshman year, I wandered from my faith without even realizing it, but God, being the most loving shepherd of all, went out of his way to find me anyway. At the start of summer, I began praying and attending church less. I wasn’t intentionally leaving God out of my life, but at that time I really was showing little to no effort in my relationship with God. On the other hand, God never gave up looking for me.

One day in late June, I was playing a soccer game in North Carolina, and we ended up blowing a 3-0 lead to come to a 3-3 tie. Our team was very frustrated and upset after that game, but we

received a pleasant surprise when the captain of the other team came to our bench asking if we would like to pray with them. We then got in a circle and he proceeded to tell us about how he himself had been lost and getting into trouble before he was invited to join this soccer team which had a Christian foundation. From there, through the team's love of God and his unity with his teammates, he turned his life around and dedicated it to God. After his inspiring testimony, our teams prayed together, and I walked off of the field with a beaming smile instead of the frown I'd had just a few minutes before. I was no longer upset about the game because I realized that God had miraculously managed to find my lost self at a random soccer tournament in North Carolina through a group of boys who I had never even met.

Since then, I have felt so much comfort and amazement knowing that even if I wander off in my faith, that God will still go over mountains and oceans to find me and save me, and I have worked harder to try to keep myself from wandering by praying and spreading God's love to others. I had been the sheep (and I know that I will probably be again), but I owed it to God now to work as his shepherd.

My mission trip to San Francisco was an especially life-changing experience for me because on that trip as God's servant, I felt as if God was working through me to be the shepherd to others. One moment especially, when I delivered a testimony to people staying at a drug rehab center, moved me very much. After the sermon, a woman named Crystal came up to me and gave me a hug saying that my testimony had inspired her and given her hope. At that moment, I just felt incredibly honored and grateful that God had blessed me with the chance to be his servant and help someone else out in their life so soon after God had done the same for me.

Now, I ask the question- how can we as members of the church and servants of God be a shepherd to the lost sheep of the world? When will we leave the 99? Maybe, for all the kids like me, we can go sit with someone at lunch who looks lonely. Or for the adults, when a friend or family member loses a loved one or maybe loses a job, will you be there for them. Even a prayer, some words of love and comfort, or a nice dinner can be huge to help someone who feels lost. If you have friends or family who have lost their way with God, can we be the shepherds who save them by demonstrating the love of our neighbors that Jesus taught us? Will we leave our homes and comfort zones by joining a mission trip or serving a charity in Charleston? Many of these opportunities to serve as a shepherd through God are available to us every day. Sometimes a simple prayer, word of kindness, or smile may seem insignificant, but it could help someone who is struggling to find their ground. "Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it?"



# FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

## “PEOPLE NEED SHEPHERDS TOO”

Scripture Lesson: John 10:14-21

*This sermon was preached by Stephen Holderness on Youth Sunday, February 3, 2019 at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.*

### **John 10:14-21**

I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.’

Again the Jews were divided because of these words. Many of them were saying, ‘He has a demon and is out of his mind. Why listen to him?’ Others were saying, ‘These are not the words of one who has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?’

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“Chicken biscuit or rice bowl?” These were the final two options my sister selected from the Bojangle’s menu before making a decision. Sadly, Megan chose the wrong answer, and yes, there is a correct answer. Chicken biscuit is always the answer. After eating the rice bowl for lunch she felt some stomach pain hours later. Eventually, her incorrect choice proved disastrous as she threw up and proceeded to use the rice bowl as a scapegoat for why she felt sick, although not likely the reason. Now as a freshman at Wofford, she attends the tailgating festivities having to look away as everyone enjoys the classic tailgating food choice of the South, Bojangle’s. Nothing is worse than undergoing an undesirable experience that ultimately deters you from that thing. No matter if you try you can’t seem to forget your experience. I’m sure many of you have had some sort of food or place ruined because of an unpleasant encounter.

The summer following my first year of high school, I went to a week-long retreat at the Montreat Conference Center. I was anxious and excited to be on a campus with over a thousand fellow Christians from several states, something I had never done before. A part of me was anxious that the week wouldn’t go smoothly; I was afraid that the sermons would be painful, my small group wouldn’t open up, and energizers would be dreadful. I didn’t want my first time at Montreat to ruin future ones, especially since I’ve heard so many people impacted by their week there. The keynote speaker for that particular week was Dr. Rodger Nishioka; he

was actually at First (Scots) for the Parramore preaching series last year. Those of you who were able to hear him preach can agree when I say his teachings are moving.

I quickly found that out early in the week which set the tone for my time at Montreat. Every morning before small group, Rodger shared his ideas for how to grow our faith and understand some of the questions that fill our mind. That week, as a rising sophomore, encouraged me to not only come back to Montreat, but stay involved in the life of the church and the youth program. Now as a senior heading off to (insert college here) I can leave knowing my faith will persist as the fast-paced adulthood approaches.

But what if I never felt God at Montreat? Or never had religious people in my life willing to try and answer some of my biggest questions? In John 10 the Jews had the luxury of asking Jesus directly their burning questions. They wanted to know, from Jesus, if he is the Messiah. Rather than telling them what they want to hear, Jesus responds by stating, "I am the good shepherd." He then says, "I lay down my life for the sheep...No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father."

The Jews didn't know what to think of Jesus' claim of death and resurrection under his own power commanded by God. Some thought he had demons, whereas others saw the message for its true meaning. Jesus wanted the Jews to decide for themselves if he is the Messiah rather than telling them straightforward. The actions he performs should display his almighty power, not just what he says; in other words, actions speak louder than words.

Flashback to the summer after freshman year, I had the opportunity to put my words into action. Montreat inspired me to live my life as Jesus commanded in Matthew 28 when he says, "Go out into the world and make disciples of all nations." That's exactly what I hoped to accomplish as I prepared to serve the people in Honduras a month after Montreat. It didn't take a full week in Tegucigalpa, Honduras to witness the Holy Spirit. Having the chance to see a typical Sunday worship service at the children's home unveiled God's power as our shepherd and protector. Many of the kids at the LAMB Institute have endured family circumstances that could easily hinder their faith journey. Instead, their joy and excitement to praise God for what they have is incredible and something I've rarely seen, if ever, before.

However, not everyone is able to find God in spite of their dreadful environment. Others can't seem to find God at all. Thomas Whitaker was a native of Houston, Texas who served eleven years on death row at the Polunsky Unit. His mother and father both raised him to be a devout Christian. After 27 years, then eight more in prison, he eventually rejected any belief in God. So what changed? Whitaker said that his ideological belief shifted largely due to a lack of what he termed "shepherds," such as priests or imams. He felt as though nobody in his life revealed the Holy Spirit to him, which would have led Whitaker to stay involved in the church; but I don't believe him. To say that God never tried to work through others in Whitaker's life is impossible. He had two faithful parents that dragged him to church each Sunday because of their love for God. They wanted their child to have a strong foundation in his faith that would produce a compassionate, religious, content young man. Whitaker's parents wanted the best for their children even if they didn't feel loved.

Life doesn't require a religious figure to express God's love in the world. But some victims of life's worst setbacks such as poverty, abuse, bullying, or depression could see their unfortunate condition as God's purpose for them. They never recognize Christ's glimpses of hope, but rather fixate on their never-ending misfortunes. All it takes is one person to foster a religious connection to God. In my life, I have been blessed with numerous shepherds throughout my faith journey. Sunday school teachers, VBS leaders, Montreat, Dr. Rodger Nishioka, Mom, Dad, Megan, Dr. Siegling, youth group members, Dr. James Rogers, LAMB Institute, the children of the LAMB, the Diaconate, Dr. Massie, Bethelwoods, Grandparents, and many other hidden shepherds. I've had all the help in the world to anchor my faith and explore God's presence in the world, but it's understandable for people to drift in their faith. When you feel like no one is on your side, even God, faith is almost impossible to maintain. I challenge you to become a shepherd in somebody's life, whether they know it or not. Whatever time or talents you can sacrifice will show your compassion for them. Particularly in the faith journey, people need shepherds to convey the Holy Spirit before they stray from the flock.