

# Sermon Starter – God’s Goodness

*Acts 2:42-47; Psalm 23; 1 Peter 2:19-25; John 10:1-10*

Abundance overflows in this week’s texts. From Jesus’ promise of overflowing life in John 10:10 through the harmony and generosity of the community in Acts 2 and the irenic vision of the Twenty-Third Psalm’s green pastures, there’s more than enough to go around. But what is the abundant life promised by the shepherd, and who is the shepherd who promised it?

The epistle text tells us that this shepherd suffered without threatening, was abused and did not return abuse; instead he entrusted himself to a just judge. As his flock, our path is to follow in his footsteps. Like Jesus’ first disciples, though, we have our doubts; it makes no sense that the suffering of “real life” could possibly fit with the abundance of Jesus’ promises. It seems obvious that of course abundant life means green pastures only. The answer of today’s texts may sound familiar to us—it’s pretty basic Christian teaching. Yet it also runs deeply counter to what many of us actually believe and live. Notice the surprising truth that Psalm 23 asserts: The good shepherd also leads through dark valleys—no promise of a smooth life here. But we are assured that we can live without being overcome by our fear and even in abundance because our shepherd has been there before us; even in the presence of enemies, a feast is spread. Abundant life comes in part from an abundant spirit.

The “overflowing” feeling we get when we read the Acts text comes from the generosity and openness of the believers, not their great wealth. Abundant life also may include the things we often associate with it—material possessions, positive emotions, or physical health—but some kinds of plenty first requires deprivation, as roses require pruning to experience the fullest growth. Whether or not we suffer now, due to lack or in the abundance of more than we can imagine, we can trust the shepherd and guardian of our souls to lead us to a place where we have what we most deeply need.

In the example of Jesus, we are invited to entrust ourselves to God’s goodness in the face of suffering, trusting that God has the last word.

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