

April 26, 2026
The Fourth Sunday of Easter

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

Let me ask you a question...*Why does it matter?*

I've been asked that question a lot over the years. I've asked it a few times myself. And...we ask that question for all kinds of reasons.

Sometimes we fall into deep desperation when we have lost a job and there are bills to pay, kids to raise and we don't know how we will even afford groceries for the week.

Sometimes, someone we love dearly has died. And the grief is so overwhelming that it feels like a betrayal to carry on without them.

Or maybe we have fallen into a place of despondency with life itself. Overcome by depression or substance abuse and we don't know how to wake up each day and do the normal things that other people take for granted.

And so we ask...*Why does it matter?*

When we ask this question what we are naming is an unbearable pain, a fractured heart, a longing for peace and meaning, a gift of grace and mercy when we are at the depths of despair. We call out to God wondering if God will hear.

We demand to know why our lives matter.

I am struck at the times when we find ourselves in these dark valleys. When life pulls at the fabric of everything we thought was good and right and just. It's those times that we often revert to questioning our meaning and worth. Afterall, we've been told that God has a plan, haven't we?

But did God plan for our pain?

I want to tell you that your faith will make things better. But, that's a too-easy answer that can feel dismissive and grossly out of touch. *If only you had a stronger faith, everything would be OK.* (Spoiler alert...I hate when people say that).

Because the strength of our faith has nothing to do with our inherent worth. Our ability to deal with pain isn't an indicator of the genuineness of our relationship with God.

We can have the most sincere love of God and still wrestle with the circumstances that we may face. Faith doesn't give us a pass on hardship. It doesn't mean we will never go through seasons of suffering. But it does mean that we never, ever have to face those seasons alone.

This is why our texts today hit at the heart of the human journey and tell us a story of hope. A story of hope you might be searching for.

And so we start with this promise...*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.*

The 23rd Psalm holds one of the most powerful stories of hope in scripture. It's a story that reminds us of one important truth...there is nothing in your life that can keep you from the love of God. In fact, verse 6 reminds us that goodness and mercy will follow us every single day of our lives. But the better translation of this verse is that we will not just be followed by God's love but that we will be pursued by God's love.

Chased down by God with a fierce determination to look you in the eyes and say...

I love you. I'm here with you. Your life is worth everything to me.

It's the same reminder we receive John when the gatekeeper calls his sheep back to the safety of home and we are told he calls them by name. Each one...a beautiful, cherished life that is known and protected and called back to safety.

As my good friend, The Rev. Pete Nunnally wrote in his new book, *Catching Hope*, (and I will paraphrase here)...we often turn toward this incredible gift of grace with a desperate anticipation. And when we trust in that grace we give into it freely and completely. We cast off our old ways of thinking; we willingly embrace the new life we are offered and take the risk of change with our whole being.¹

It reminds me of the grace that is offered in the 23rd Psalm. Green pastures and still waters where our deepest of pain is healed, where our weary souls finally rest, where we begin to see a path forward out of the dark valleys we have traveled.

It's the moment we can begin to cast off our fear, our anger, our grief and let the love of God gently and kindly hold us until we can walk out of that valley and into the graciousness of new life.

And so when you find yourself asking...why does it matter...I want you to remember that God loves you. All of you. Your life is worth everything to God.

¹ Nunnally, Pete. *Catching Hope: The Hidden Spiritual Wisdom of Fishing*. Broadleaf Books, 2026. P.91

Celtic Blessing

God to enfold me,
God to surround me,
God in my speaking,
God in my thinking.

God in my sleeping,
God in my waking,
God in my watching,
God in my hoping.

God in my life,
God in my lips,
God in my soul,
God in my heart.

God in my sufficing,
God in my slumber,
God in mine ever-living soul,
God in mine eternity.²

² Originally from the *Carmina Gadelica III*, 53, this version was taken from Esther de Waal, editor, *The Celtic Vision* (Triumph, 2001), p.20.