

The Fourth Sunday of Easter
April 26, 2026
Psalm 23
The Rev. David B. Hodges

Who do you trust? There is story about a woman who was traveling on a long airplane flight during which the pilot made an announcement asking the passengers to take their seats and fasten their seat belts because of some unexpected turbulence. Later the pilot calmly told the passengers that because of the expected weather conditions, there would be no beverage service. A little while after that the pilot announced that there would also be no meal service. As the woman looked around at those seated near her, she could tell that some people were getting a little worried. Soon after that the plane began to go through a very intense storm that caused it to dramatically go up and down and to be tossed around in the sky. At that point the woman was also becoming anxious and many of the passengers were visibly upset, and some had even begun to pray and it was then that she noticed a little girl who was seated near her who was reading a book and appeared to be perfectly calm. Even during the worst parts of the storm, the child remained composed and seemingly unafraid. The woman was amazed and when the plane finally landed and everyone was hurriedly getting their things to get off, the girl sat calmly in her seat waiting for everyone else. At that point the woman decided that she too would wait so that she could talk to this little girl. After she made comments about the storm, the woman then asked the girl why she hadn't been afraid. The little girl replied, "my Dad is the pilot, and he is taking me home."

Who do you trust? It has been pointed out that trust is one of the principal forces that binds us together. Being able to trust is something that impacts all forms of our social relationships. Our internal models of trust are shaped through our earliest relationships—especially with parents or caregivers (*John Bowlby's Attachment Theory*). We would not be able to function without a certain

level of trust in things or people. Trust affects how we will or will not interact with others and understanding the decision to trust, or not to trust, is crucial (“*How and why humans trust*,” www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles).

During the last several years there has been a noticeable decline in trust in this country which some are now referring to as a crisis. As one writer puts it as trust has collapsed, ***one of the few remaining things that unites us is our feeling of distrust*** (Benjamin Pacini, “*How America lost faith in its institutions — and what it will take to rebuild*,” *Desert News*, 4/28/25). This crisis of trust is showing up in almost every part of our public life; government, religion, media, public health, higher education, you name it. It has been pointed out that ***if it feels like nobody trusts anything anymore, it’s because, increasingly, we don’t*** and questions are being asked about what happens when trust collapses (Benjamin Pacini). What is it that holds us together? In writing about that question, Kristen Bellstrom says it ***is one that weighs heavily on American life and hangs over the biggest issues of the day***. Though bright spots may appear here and there, she says, the trend line for trust is going in one direction, down (“*Republic of Distrust*,” *Bloomberg Opinion*, 9/12/24).

A few minutes ago, we [read] [listened to the choir sing] Psalm 23 that has been referred to as a psalm that has a ***grip that is deep and genuine***, a psalm ***that is such a simple statement that it can bear its own witness without their needing to be any comment*** (Walter Brueggemann). Psalm 23 is not very long; it is only six verses with fifty-five Hebrew words and unlike many psalms there are almost no repetitions. Again and again, it is the psalm that we want to hear and that we choose to read at funerals and at the most critical times in our lives. Again and again, it is the psalm that many of us turn to for reassurance. Unlike many other bible passages, Psalm 23 appears every

year in the cycle of readings that we use in our worship services, and it is always read on this particular Sunday, the 4th Sunday of Easter.

As we hear the words of this psalm again this morning and think about it for the next few minutes, I would like for us to read the most familiar and most requested version of Psalm 23. It is found in the *Book of Common Prayer* on page 476. Please take a prayer book, which is the red book in the pew rack, and turn to page 476. Let's read this version of Psalm 23 in unison: ***The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul; he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his Name's sake. 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. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.***

There are a lot of psalms in the Bible, one hundred and fifty of them, some of them are familiar while others are not. Some of the psalms seem to be straightforward while others are not as easy to read or relate to. Some of the psalms are joyful, others are more negative, and some are even cries for vengeance. Some of the psalms are short, like this one, others are much longer and wordy. Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann says that what the Psalms can help us see is a world that is ***occupied by God. Generation after generation, faithful women and men turn to the Psalms as a most helpful resource for conversation with God about things that matter most.*** The Psalms, Brueggemann says, cover the ***entire gamut of*** [how we talk] ***to God, from profound praise to the utterance of unspeakable anger and doubt.***

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. Even though the text of Psalm 23 talks about death and references walking through a *valley of the shadow of death*, this is a psalm that is referred to as being a song of trust. In her writing about these kinds of psalms, Kelly Murphy points out that *songs of trust have two things in common: a perceived calamity of some kind and trust that the calamity or disaster shall pass and all will be well.* Psalm 23, she says, reminds us that *God sustains, provides, and cares for us, not once but time and time again* (*Commentary on Psalm 23, Kelly Murphy, Working Preacher, 3/15/26*).

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. Recently, I heard someone ask a question that I have been thinking about. *What keeps us from fully, unequivocally trusting in God? What keeps us from fully, unequivocally trusting in God?* Think about that. All of us have some trust issues, that come from the reality of various life experiences. Things happen that harm our ability to trust, things like lying, manipulation, broken promises, times when someone intentionally hurt us. Losing trust is part of human nature. But as someone has said, imagine what it could be like, if we lived as if we really knew the truth conveyed in the words of Psalm 23. Imagine what it could be like if you and I went about the day to day of our lives as if we really knew this truth because of our trust in God (*Elizabeth Webb*).

Jake Owensby is a bishop and author who points out that *we live in a world cluttered with voices* that are constantly *competing for our attention*, that encourage *us to trust them*. Those voices influence our opinions, they influence our actions, and they shape our desires often without our realizing it. We cannot trust every voice we hear, he says. Some voices draw us toward love, toward openness, toward a closer relationship with Christ. Other voices turn us inward, and they

narrow our ability to really see what is going around us. As Owensby goes on to say, *the question is not whether we will hear a voice, but whose voice we will learn to trust and follow* (*The Woodlands*, “*The Voice We Learn to Trust*,” 4/24/26).

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. No matter how you want to say it, or which translation you use, remember that these words from a song of trust are a constant reminder of the power and love of God. Imagine what it could be like, if you and I went about the day to day of our lives as if we really knew this truth and trusted in it. *The question is not whether we will hear a voice, but whose voice we will learn to trust and follow.* What is it that keeps us, you and me, from fully listening to the voice of God and unequivocally trusting in God?