

**Sunday, April 30, 2023 – Easter Hill United Methodist Church**  
**Guardian of the Soul**  
**Bible Study**  
**Psalm 23 and 1 Peter 2:19-25**

Open with a word of prayer

**Gathering Time** (5-10 minutes). Separate participants into pairs or groups of three and have them share their responses to the question, “What comes to mind when you hear Psalm 23? Are there any verses that are especially meaningful to you?”

**Psalm 23. Context.** This psalm is one of the best known in the Bible, especially as it expresses the assurance of God’s love and presence in the face of death. It also expresses the idea that God will provide everything we need for life: food (“green pastures”), water (“still waters”), safety (“right paths”). God is the one who keeps us alive (restores my soul). It’s an attitude that opens us up to truly radical generosity and hospitality.

**1 Peter 2:19-25. Context.** Again this week, there is a certain correspondence between this week’s reading from 1 Peter and the reading from the Acts: in Acts we read of the new lifestyle taken up by the converts; in 1 Peter, the author, after giving a general exhortation regarding the meaning of salvation, moves to a description of how his hearers should live, now that they have been called to a faith that is often at odds with the society from which they have come. This week’s reading is taken from what is called a “household code,” a code of conduct that spells out proper behavior for different members of the household. In ancient times, the household included slaves. Here, the author is addressing the slaves, no doubt a sizeable segment of any of the early Christian congregations. Roman economy and society were built around slave labor. Slavery was not a matter of race, but of other factors: many were prisoners of war, or other foreigners brought by force. In hard times, parents on the brink of starvation might sell their children into slavery in order to survive – a practice that continues today. By definition slaves were property and could be abused with impunity in every way by their masters. Slaves frequently escaped when the opportunity arose, and there was a thriving trade in returning runaways. Some slaves were allowed to buy their freedom. For others, the best hope they had was that their masters, when they died, would bequeath them their freedom. Here the author encourages slaves not to return abuse with abuse, but to follow the example of Jesus, whose behavior was modeled on Isaiah’s description of the Suffering Servant.

**Read Psalm 23 and 1 Peter 2:19-25**

What touches your heart, what do you hear in the scripture, what questions do you have, or what doesn’t make sense to you in the text?

## **Read Psalm 23 and 1 Peter 2:19-25 again -**

Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

### **Some reflection questions –**

- When you read Psalm 23, who do you imagine is saying it— young David as he shepherded his flocks; King David as he reflected on the past; or someone who thought about King David as a shepherd?
- Who do you think is the shepherd and guardian of the soul? (1 Peter 2:25) Do you find this image of Jesus comforting? Why or why not?
- “More of us have felt that guardian through the words and actions of the community that surrounds us.” Has this been true for you? Why or why not?
- “If you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval” (v. 20).
- What reaction do you have when you read this? Have you had an experience like this? What does this say about the role of suffering in the Christian life? Does the Christian life always look like being “blessed”?
- How have we all strayed like sheep (v. 25)? [Trusting in our own abilities or finding comfort in things that do not provide eternal joy.] How exactly have we returned to the guardian of our souls (v. 25)? [We return through repentance, trust, faith, and obedience.]
- Read 1 Peter 2:25 “For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls,” and Psalm 23:6, “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.” Knowing God’s blessings are all around us and often the guardian (Jesus) uses us to reach out to others to bless them and share about Jesus, what are you going to do today and/or this week to be a blessing?

### **Closing Reflection Question**

How is this scripture calling you to change, to see, to be or what might it be calling you to do?

**Prayer** (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

**Sending Forth** (2 minutes). After all, have shared, end by praying the following or a similar prayer:

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. **Amen.**

And now we pray The Lord's Prayer....

Our Father who art in Heaven

hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,

on earth as it is in Heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Lead us not into temptation

but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power

and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.