

Sts. Peter & Paul Riverside, Illinois
Sunday Service-Fourth Sunday of Easter-April 26, 2026
Sermon by Rev. Marnie Rourke

Well, my sermon is not written my normal way. I'm having a conversation with God and I recorded it for you rather than doing a regular type sermon. So, I hope you get the message and I hope you hear the love.

And please know, I should have said this. I learned when I was hitchhiking all over Ireland, England, Scotland, and Wales that sheep do know the shepherd's voice. A shepherd calls a sheep and they follow. They don't follow the other guy. And over there, they don't have fences to hold in the sheep. They have spots on the hind quarters that say, "Hi, I'm blue. I'm pink. I'm green, and I belong to that shepherd." So all the sheep are good. All of them around and all of them have shepherds.

So let us pray.

The Lord is my shepherd.

I really need a good shepherd because I really am a lost sheep. Yep. Me. But Lord, you know, I don't have time for you to lead me. Maybe tomorrow or the next day. Look, I don't even have time to write this sermon. Can't you write it for me? As a lost sheep, I don't have much worth saying. Presidents. They have ghost writers. Like Obama. Maybe it was his wife. Good Shepherd, you could be mine if you wanted to.

I shall not want.

I know that I didn't actually want for the necessities of life, Lord, like I did when I was young and restless and stole my roommate's food. But there are so many things I could use. Oh, a fancy toaster oven that air fries and well, a new bathtub. Oh, and um a bigger bank account. Come to think of it, there's a lot of things I want. I wouldn't complain if a church called me to be their part-time pastor or if my retirement income went up a little.

He makes me lie down in green pastures.

Well, yes, you did once. I don't suppose you could arrange another little trip to Ireland, could you? It's only been 50 years and NASA's taking my daughter there in October. Yes, I can always walk down the street. There's a park at the end of the block and through that park, but I want green pastures. And I certainly don't have time to drive into the country or up to Lutherdale just to lie down in some grassy meadow every time I want to.

He leads me besides still waters.

A pleasant enough phrase. I hope someday in heaven I'll take just such a walk with you good shepherd. But you know how it is here. There's always a million things to do. Besides, the only reason the water is still is because it's so polluted, nothing can live in it anymore.

He restores my soul.

He what? Restores. Like when you take an old chest of drawers and refinish it so you can use it some more. That's a lot of work, isn't it? Well, if that's what you want, Lord, go ahead. But I can keep on using my old soul just the way it is. Besides, you don't think you can trick me into some more work, do you? I've been retired twice enough, and more grace doesn't change my learning contract. Just ask Pastor Mark, my internship supervisors. He's up there with you at dinner table now.

He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

And all along I thought you were keeping me on the straight and narrow path just so our meals on wheels lunches could be delivered without my getting into an accident. Or I could lead another funeral. But I really am all for righteousness, Lord. But I have so many other things to do. Could we postpone this little jaunt for a while? Just for a while. But don't forget to put some gas in my tank. I've been running low lately. And um, well, everything costs more.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.

You will be with me, with me forever, Lord, won't you? I can't go through another day all by myself. And I don't like walking in the dark shadows that are everywhere at night. I might be a lost sheep, but I sure don't want to get lost in the dark like Satan.

Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

How about a little more staff and a little less rod? What are you trying to do? Make me a saint? It's hard enough being a Christian, especially when you're also pastor, even if you are retired.

You prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies.

So far, it's been me watching my enemies, feasting, and making merry. Let's show them. I'm not too old for someone to die and leave me thousands. Then I could afford to move into independent living for seniors where they really do serve gourmet meals. And Lord, you know I will never stop baking cookies for my grandkids. Yes, Lord. They're not my enemies. Duh.

You anoint my head with oil.

What for? I'm tired of people telling me my nose is shiny.

My cup overflows.

Well, maybe not. Actually, there are a few more things I would like that I forgot to mention. A new car. Mine's only 19 years old. Lord, a new mattress. Even a new bed. Okay, one more chance to worship at the old LSTC.

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.

I'm kind of busy right now, Lord, but you still have room for me, don't you? Won't you? Can't you?

The Lord is my shepherd.

Lord, don't you ever get tired of looking for me when I keep getting lost all the time? I shall not want. Yes, Lord. My life has been full of difficult moments, but you've made sure that I was never so alone that somebody didn't give me the love I needed like my BFF and her parents did.

He makes me lie down in green pastures.

Oh Lord, there is never a day when your creation doesn't show me a masterpiece that puts my heart at ease.

He leads me beside still waters.

Thanks Lord for the pastor who held me in his loving arms when I was small and afraid when he poured the water over me. Thank you for the gift of blessing me with the gift of baptizing my own daughter whose birthday was this week. Making it possible for me to be certain that no matter what happened or how I fail, your spirit will be there to give her peace.

He restores my soul.

Every time I confess my sins to you, you forgive me. And I can't tell you how good it always feels. I only hope I can learn to be as nice to other people as you always are to me.

He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

Lord, only you know where you want me to go. Lead me and I will always follow. Please don't let anybody miss me when I'm gone. Let me leave your love with them so they will never be lonely.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil, for you are with me.

Lord, with you beside me, I can face every temptation. But we're all afraid of dying. When you stay close like you are now, I find it easier to keep on believing and hoping in the resurrection. Just like I've always told everyone at all the funerals I had the joy of leading to do. Just keep on believing. Just keep on believing.

Your rod and staff comfort me.

You keep on pushing me towards your people. And though it's hard, I keep trying, Lord, because the closer I get to your children, the closer I stay to you. And we are all, we are all looking for you, Lord.

You prepared table for me in the presence of my enemies.

Thank you, Lord, for helping us overcome our differences. We know that we are forgiven and not forgotten. Even though we forget our sins, we forget them as best we can in order to love one another. Thank you for giving us your body and blood to eat so that we no longer hunger. Thank you for strengthening us with your love.

You anoint my head with oil.

Not just ashes. Why me, Lord? For I am chief among all sinners. I do not deserve your blessing.

My cup overflows.

Praise to you, my Lord, my God. How can I ever stop telling the world and the person I see every time I look in the mirror about all the wonders of your love? Your love that keeps flowing over, flowing over, absolutely everything.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I like you will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Be with me, Lord, that as I prepare room for you in my heart, you might become the center of life, of my life. For just this moment, let your kingdom come. For I trust in you to love us all, both now and forever.

Amen.