

In Jesus' name. Amen.

...as follows in Jesus' name:

I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the Good Shepherd. I know My own and My own know Me, just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to My voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. (ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

People loved by God, especially you, David and Susan, Jennifer, and Scott,

To those who knew Diana, it wouldn't be a surprise that she would appreciate the 23rd Psalm,

The Lord is My Shepherd, as so many do.

The tranquil scene of a caring shepherd leading and watching over his flock is a calming thought, especially when life isn't quite so calm. It gives you something to cherish and hope for.

And for an animal-lover like Diana, there's a fondness for that caring relationship.

She loved animals. She loved their company. She loved taking care of them.

She raised her 3 sons on a working 55-acre ranch with the requisite animals for a proper Texas ranch: chickens, cows, cats, dogs, goats, geese, and horses.

And her heart went out to the strays she would find, to give them a home, and nurse them back to health, when necessary.

And even when she returned to WA, she wanted some acreage so that she could keep her horses.

Even now, there are chickens, geese, and goats still roaming the pasture.

But it wasn't only animals that she loved and cared for.

She loved people, too. She loved taking care of them.

So when times were tough & money was thin (because bookkeeping for \$0.28 an hour wasn't enough), she studied to be an LPN under a state grant program...

and, after awhile, she put herself through school to become an RN.

So there she was, nursing complete strangers back to health.

But it wasn't just animals and strangers that she cared for. She also loved her family...

She sacrificed a lot to support her young family...

she worked hard... at work...on the ranch...in the garden... in the kitchen...

Her marriage was difficult, and it didn't work out the way she had dreamed it would.

And when the marriage ended, there she was with her three sons, a working, single mother with a working ranch.

But she wasn't alone, either. Her mother Willena had helped purchase the ranch

and had moved in with Diana's family and was able and willing to help.

And that would be a partnership that would last for the rest of Willena's life...

until she was 98 years old (8 years ago).

But being one that took care of so many lives, whether people or animals,
she knew and appreciated the care and compassion that her Lord had for her.
If she could love so freely... yet imperfectly,
then how much better could her perfect Good Shepherd freely love and care for her.

This is certainly one of the reasons why Diana liked the 23rd Psalm so much,
not because it conjured up the imagery of a cute farm animal,
but because she recognized her real need for The Good Shepherd to care for her and her family.

Like many of the strays that she herself had cared for, she, too, felt lost at times.
She struggled: to trust Him for all her good,
to know and remember that He loved her... especially in the difficult times.
Part of this was because of the guilt that she had accumulated over the years.
Like most moms, she had a constant nagging voice in her head that told her,
she wasn't good enough... that her family's problems were her fault.
Of course, she also had the other voice trying to justify herself
and to push the blame completely onto others, as if she had done nothing wrong,
but she also knew that that wasn't completely honest, either.
And in her pain and suffering, especially in the last months,
she struggled with the nagging feeling that God must have been punishing her for something.
Those inner voices can be really convincing, and they can cause you then to fear the Good Shepherd
so that you want to scatter from Him, thinking that He desires to beat you and be rid of you.

But as the Lord is gracious to each one of us, He continued to call out to her... to call her to Himself.
And she heard the Good Shepherd's voice and did not run away.
Like the helpless strays that she had cared for... that needed to be nurtured back to health,
she recognized that she couldn't pull herself up by her own bootstraps.
Her works weren't good enough to spare her... or redeem her.
She didn't need just a helper, she needed a Savior.
She needed the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for her...
and that is exactly what she got.
Her sufferings weren't a punishment from God – He had already punished Jesus for her.
Her Good Shepherd spent Himself, His precious blood to purchase and redeem her to be His own...
and He washed her in His blood in Holy Baptism, claiming her as His own,
not as a stray, or stranger, but as His own dear and beloved child.

...

He still calls out to gather His sheep to Himself, and His sheep still hear His voice.
Where we frail humans will constantly disappoint... Jesus, the Good Shepherd is faithful;
and leads us in peace to the green pastures and quiet waters of His Word of forgiveness.
Where we flee in fear from the devil... Jesus has stood up to him and bested him;
and prepares for us a table in the Lord's Supper; even in the presence of our enemy, we eat in peace.
Where we have no power against the death... Jesus used His authority to lay down His life in death
and then to take it up again,
and now walks with us through the valley of the shadow of death so that we fear no evil through it.

...

For Diana, the trust that she struggled with – as all of us do – has now turned to sight.

The condemning inner voices have all been silenced and

the voice of her Shepherd has led her to the eternal home of her heavenly Father...

to the paradise that Jesus went to prepare for her and for all His family.

She awaits but one more promise, the promise of the resurrection of her body from the dead

that Christ will accomplish on the last day when He returns.

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Soli Deo Gloria