

Daily Reflection from Rosemary Pearson

Hello Everyone

Psalm 23

The best-known and favourite of psalms - no. 23, has been put to various tunes, including two 19th Century ones - Crimond and Brother James' Air, some from the 20th Century, as well as Howard Goodall's 21st Century tune to accompany "The Vicar of Dibley" series. It is sung at weddings and funerals, school assemblies and great choir festivals. Its over-familiarity may cause us to overlook the treasure it is. It is well-worth considering its meaning in greater depth.

The key to understanding this psalm lies in its first five verses..."The Lord is my shepherd." The rest flows from it.

David who wrote it, was much more familiar than we are with the shepherd imagery, having himself been a shepherd-boy and used to protecting sheep from the dangers of wild animals at night. From an early age he discovered the importance of depending on the Greater Shepherd. Later in life, when he became a fugitive who was frequently hounded by human enemies, his earlier discovery of God's dependability must have been invaluable.

Likening himself to a sheep in the first 4 verses, David knew an intimate relationship with God who tenderly provided all his needs, physical and emotional. The Great Shepherd knew exactly where to find him quiet resting places and lush food, as well as spiritual restoration, direction and correction.

Even in the darkest of places David knew the security and protection of God being alongside him – the rod of discipline keeping him on track, and the staff providing support. There were blessings too, even in the presence of enemies.

There was confidence for the future as David looked forward to abundant blessing both in this life and into eternity.

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Living in the presence of danger and evil is something that David discovered from an early age. We don't go very far in life without discovering it either.

Some Christians carry the erroneous belief that nothing difficult should ever happen to them. This idea is completely wrong and is very unhelpful because when difficulties do occur, their faith takes an immediate tumble and they do not know how to cope with it.

From Genesis onward the Bible accepts the presence of evil in the world as fact. It is something we all have to live with. The reason that Jesus came into our world was to conquer evil decisively on the cross. We look forward to eternity when we will know this in fullness, but while we are on this earth we live with evil as a present reality.

Some of us may have experienced extreme difficulties through this time. The important thing is to know that God is alongside us and trust Him to bring us safely through. This means staying close to Him in obedience, and not try to find answers outside of His leading, because that will only lead us away from His protection.

God has not promised that we will bypass dark valleys, but to be with us when we go through them. The key to knowing Him as our Shepherd is to trust Him day by day to lead, guide and protect us through whatever happens. This is something the rest of the world does not know and struggles on its own to find answers to problems. The present dark valley of the coronavirus, with all its attendant problems, has shaken the foundations of many people's lives. Without Him people are indeed sheep without a shepherd.

I learnt from an early age that God was my shepherd and this has always been one of my favourite pictures of Him. As a child, I remember talking to Him after my Mum tucked me into bed at night! The years that followed included many ups and downs when my faith was tested and needed to mature.

Whether you discovered it young or only recently, or perhaps you still are not sure – to know that God is always there for you is the greatest blessing you can have. Finding security in Him is the basis for a life that is able to deal with whatever comes along. All Christians need to keep coming back to the Shepherd day by day - perhaps even several times a day.

Like David, we too can learn to appreciate His daily blessings as we look forward one day to the eternal banquet.

*Wherever He may guide me,
No want shall turn me back:
My Shepherd is beside me,
And nothing can I lack:
His wisdom ever waketh,
His sight is never dim:
He knows the way He taketh,
And I will walk with Him.”*

(Anna L. Waring)