

Intro:

Over the next few weeks as we cannot meet in the normal way of church I hope to produce a mini devotional for each weekend, I hope they may be of some help as many of us have to alter our regular routines. This is the first:

March 22nd Psalm 23

1 The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters,

3 He restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

6 Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

It has been a shock over the past few weeks to experience the empty shelves in the shops and supermarkets. We are so used to buying whatever we wish, in the secure knowledge that the items will be magically replaced. Now you can go in as I did this week after the church meeting with Michelle and Wendy to discover that there was virtually nothing to buy.

Psalm 23 is the lectionary text from the psalms from Thursday to today the fourth Sunday in Lent, just six verses to sustain you and me for the best part of a week. However, these are very special verses, and probably the most well-known verses in the Old Testament. In Psalm 119.11 the writer says that he has **hidden God's word in his heart**. My guess is that if you close your eyes you can recite this psalm by heart, and as you do you can imagine the shifting scenes it portrays.

Three thousand years and a very different cultural context separates us from the psalmist, however there are many parallels to our strange new situation. For although shopping was quite different for an Israelite all those years ago, and there were many different things to be afraid of, the importance of provision and protection was just as important, and this psalm is about provision and protection.

The psalmist is absolutely confident that God can and would provide for all his needs, so just as a Palestinian sheep trusts the shepherd to look after it, he could trust God to provide for all his needs. He can say with confidence **"I shall not want"**.

He knows that his Shepherd Lord will lead him to the spiritual **green pastures** and the **still waters**. He knows when he feels broken and damaged, that the Shepherd will **anoint his wounds with healing oil** and **restore his wounded soul**. Even in the darkest most dangerous and loneliest valley, **he need not fear**, because the shepherd is **always with him to guide and protect**. No attack from behind can overcome him, because the Shepherd has put two guards at his back **"Goodness and mercy"**.

And though at times surrounded by enemies he knows that the shepherd is on guard and has **provided a table spread** with the spiritual fruit to sustain him, and the **overflowing cup** to refresh him.

Moreover, at the end of his journey, he knows that he has a safe place in the **house of the shepherd**.

The shelves may be depleted for a while in the supermarkets, we might feel keenly the problems of isolation, we may feel that the whole world is on a journey through a dark valley, as we listen and watch the news reports, but as the psalmist knew, the good shepherd who has brought us this far will not desert on this particularly narrow path.

Finally, with the psalmist we can trust him to bring us safely and with rejoicing along whatever path he leads us to our final destination, His own eternal home.

Why not close your eyes and try to recite the psalm from memory and as you do imagine the journey the psalmist describes?

May Jesus the Good Shepherd guard you and those you love and may He keep you safe now and always.

David

PS: Did you notice where the psalmist moves from description to prayer?