

A psalm for the times – Psalm 23

Reflection for 9th August 2020

by Revd John Rackley

Kibworth High Street on a recent Thursday morning. Two ladies are having a chat at five yards. “I don’t like change” one announced. Social distancing made her shout.

“No; but you have to get used to it” came her companion’s reply.

“Never”.

With that I was out of earshot – which was a pity really.

Change – it’s not easy is it? We usually think of change at the start of something new but it usually *happens when something old falls apart not when something new occurs.*

Hold that thought for a moment.

What do Leicestershire and Ancient Israel have in common?

Sheep. The wealth of Israel and Leicestershire lay in their flocks of sheep.

Shepherds were a crucial occupation. It is no accident that Israel described their kings and leaders as shepherds. They were not just there to protect the flock from predators but also help the sheep grow strong, healthy and flourish.

This is the emphasis of a great psalm of David at the heart of the Old Testament – the sheep lie in green pastures and are led to pools of still water. In Psalm 23, the Lord is the shepherd and his sheep will lack for nothing.

But what I notice this morning is that there is a dramatic surge of faith in the midst of the psalm: The psalmist begins with a declaration of faith but ends with a prayer of trust and praise.

The Lord is my shepherd.....

*though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, **YOU ARE WITH ME.***

He moves from what he believes about God to speaking directly to God.

There is belief and there is prayer.

Prayer grows out of belief. If we don't pray with our beliefs, what's the point of them?

He leaves thoughts about God behind and tells us – 'this is what I hold on to'. The Lord is with me – he is my saviour, he nourishes me and I will know where I belong for the whole of my life.

May I suggest you pause for a moment; read the psalm and notice where the psalm speaks to you?

In one of the gospel readings for today in John 6: 35 Jesus describes himself as the bread of heaven.

He feeds his followers.

He feeds through -

his teaching,

his presence.

He spreads a table before us – the table of his supper, a table of thanksgiving, a table where there is a place for each of us, always laid and ready.

He is constantly looking out for the welfare of his followers – he is there to nourish us so that we do not go hungry or thirsty.

David Walker Bishop of Manchester writing about this psalm says,

'To see our lives as a constant series of crises from which we seek God's power to deliver us, or errors of judgement, from which we need him to rescue us, fails to do justice to the biblical imagery of shepherd and flock.

'We live in bewildering and complex times – but today's psalm suggests we should live confidently, defined more by God's promises than our problems'.

There's a reason to pause – are we more defined by our problems than our faith in God??

What's this got to do with change and the lady outside the Post Office in Kibworth?

It is this: Change happens – we must get used to it; learn ways of coping; learn to live at a deeper level than what happens on the surface of our life.

Are you and I ready to stop treating God like a celestial air ambulance which we only expect to turn up when we happen to get into trouble?

God wants to be more than that:

Deep pools, still waters, rich pastures – attentive prayer, exploring the teaching of the good Shepherd, learning from other travellers on the way and allowing our spirits to expand into fresh ways of faith will show us that we don't need a crisis to discover that ***we are NEVER ALONE.***

A prayer:

Eternal God, we can make many plans for each day.
But we don't really know what any day will bring, despite our plans.
And more – we are a mist. We appear for a while – and then vanish.
My life like everyone else is here but for a moment; but you are eternal.
May I embark upon each day, intentional about what I think you want me to do, and yet humble about the limits of my plans, my knowledge, my control.
Into your hands may I and other people of faith commit each day. AMEN

A prayer for the onward journey:

From where we are, to where you need us;
From the security of what we know, to the adventure of what you will reveal;
To refashion the fabric of the world into the likeness of your kingdom
Until the new earth and the new heaven is revealed
JESUS LEAD US ON.

A blessing

Now may the God of peace,
who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus,
the great Shepherd of the sheep,
by the blood of the eternal covenant,
make you and I complete in everything good
so that we may do his will,
working among us what is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be
glory forever and ever.
Amen