



The Methodist Church

Ripon and Lower Dales Methodist Circuit

Worship at Home – 30 April 2023

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Wherever you are sharing in this act of worship, you are welcome.

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.
Worship the Lord with gladness;
come into God's presence with singing.

Know that the Lord is God.
It is God that made us, and we are His;
we are God's people, and the sheep of His pasture.

Enter the gates with thanksgiving,
and God's courts with praise.
Give thanks to God, bless His name.

For the Lord is good;
God's steadfast love endures for ever,
and His faithfulness to all generations.

Hymn: Singing the Faith 365

Jesus, Thou Joy of loving hearts,
Thou Fount of life, Thou Light of men,
From the best bliss that earth imparts,
We turn unfilled to Thee again.

Thy truth unchanged hath ever stood;
Thou savest those that on Thee call;
To them that seek Thee, Thou art good,
To them that find Thee, all in all!

We taste Thee, O Thou living Bread,
And long to feast upon Thee still;
We drink of Thee, the Fountain-head,
And thirst our souls from Thee to fill!

Our restless spirits yearn for Thee,
Where'er our changeful lot is cast;
Glad when Thy gracious smile we see,
Blest, when our faith can hold Thee fast.

O Lord, be Thou our strength and stay!
Make all our moments calm and bright,
Chase all dark thoughts of sin away,
Shed o'er us here Thy holy light.

God of Peace,
who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus,
the great Shepherd of the sheep,
through the blood of an eternal covenant,
make us perfect in goodness
so that we may do Your will;
and create in us what is pleasing to You;
through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.

Good Shepherd Jesus,
Your love opens the gate to life that all may go in.
Create within us Lord, a desire to do justice,
to love mercy and to walk humbly with You.

There have been times when we have wandered from Your way
and not listened to Your voice,
easily led and taken with others.
Yet we believe You are the Gate
and that whoever enters by You, Jesus, will be saved,
and will come in and go out and find pasture.

Refresh and renew us in Your presence, we pray.
Open our ears and our hearts
to hear Your call anew in this time of worship today.
May we find in Your embrace forgiveness and joy
as our lives are re-purposed in Your service.
To the glory of Your name. Amen

Reading: Psalm 23

- 1 The Lord is my shepherd; •
therefore can I lack nothing.
- 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures •
and leads me beside still waters.

- 3 He shall refresh my soul •
and guide me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
- 4 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 spread a table before me
in the presence of those who trouble me; •
you have anointed my head with oil
and my cup shall be full.
- 6 Surely goodness and loving mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life, •
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Reading: John 10: 1 – 10

Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. ²The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.' ⁶Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

7 So again Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

Reflection

Psalm 23 is perhaps the best known and best loved of all 150 Psalms in the Psalter. There will be many sermons preached this Sunday about sheep and about God being a shepherd and leading us to green pasture and rescuing us from our waywardness. "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." I've grown to love and depend on the Psalms over the past few years. When you have no words of your own to pray, the prayers of the Psalmist remind us there is no life experience or emotion we cannot bring before God. The Psalms are amazingly honest.

The rawness of human existence is named, but that rawness is met by the care and dependability of God.

The American monk and activist Thomas Merton once wrote: “The secret of prayer is hunger for God. The will to pray is the essence of prayer.” We bring what we feel and place it in the hands of God who is big enough to cope with us! I was taught a long time ago that the most important word in a Psalm might well be “but”. My day is rubbish God, I don’t know what’s going on, but I trust you and I know you are there, so come on, do something!

Psalm 23 is full of promises, certainties, and is a divine roadmap out of bad times into a new reality of deep joy. I want to leave the shepherd bit to Sunday’s preachers, and look at three other bits of the Psalm we often don’t dwell on.

First, this verse.

“Even though I walk through the valley of shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.”

Someone whose husband died suddenly said “I never realised the twenty-third psalm was about me. I thought it was about my husband, but it’s not. I’m the one walking through the valley of the shadow of death.”

For each of us, there comes a time when we realise we are walking through the valley of the shadow of death. It might be the death of a loved one, the recognition of our own mortality, the death of a dream. What comfort is there in this darkness? Why not fear evil? The psalmist says there is something of God upholding us—that God is with us in the midst of the dark valleys of this life. I often say at a funeral service we need to note we don’t die in the valley, we are led through it, which brings me to the second promise.

“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. My cup overflows.”

I love the fact the Psalmist is led out of the valley into an eternity of delight with God, an eternity of feasting and abundance. There’s nothing nicer than being satisfied by a good meal.

The feast in eternity with God is a banquet. And where is it? In the presence of my enemies!

Even if we have walked through a dark valley, perhaps the darkest of all valleys ever, God will lead us through it so we successfully reach the other

side. The danger will be behind us and we will transition into His marvellous light.

It is then, after we leave the valley, we will find His holy table. The table illustrates abundance, satisfaction, and everlasting love. God's people can feast at His table of endless love and grace and no enemy of any sort can ever take it away. And our cup overflows! At communion we speak of it being a foretaste of the heavenly banquet prepared for all people. Then we give out really tiny cubes of bread and small glasses of wine!!

A valley walked through, a banquet overflowing with generosity where enemies are shown the grace and fun of God putting them back in their selfish and evil box, and then this:

“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.”

Walter Brueggemann, in his book, *The Message of The Psalms*, categorizes all 150 psalms into one of three movements—orientation, disorientation, and reorientation. Each of these movements exemplify a fragment of the human experience:

I. Orientation: when everything feels right and content in our lives.

II. Disorientation: when life feels difficult, dark, and broken. There is lament. There is despair.

III. Re-Orientation: when God pulls us out of the brokenness of life and we are brought to a deeper sense of awareness and gratitude.

Brueggemann argues that we go through rhythms of orientation to disorientation to re-orientation—it is part of the natural human experience. The end of this Psalm has us exclaim “surely”. We know where our faith leads: to dwell with God for ever, to know God's goodness and mercy every day, to journey even in uncertainty confidently.

Brueggemann further writes, “It is almost pretentious to comment on this psalm. The grip it has on biblical spirituality is deep and genuine. It is such a simple statement that it can bear its own witness without comment.”

So let me end like this having highlighted three promises in the six verses of the Psalm and not mentioning the sheep bit at all. From the *Feasting on the Word* series, in his advice for how to preach this passage, pastor

David Burns writes, “One way to approach preaching Psalm 23 is not to preach it. Just read it slowly—preferably in the King James Version—and then sit down.” Over the next few days, why not find a quiet place and do that. What does this ancient prayer do to you?

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:

He leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul:

He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil; for thou art with me:

Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:

Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:

And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Hymn: Singing the Faith 481

The Lord’s my shepherd, I’ll not want;
He makes me lie in pastures green.
He leads me by the still, still waters,
His goodness restores my soul.

And I will trust in You alone,
And I will trust in You alone,
For Your endless mercy follows me,
Your goodness will lead me home.

He guides my ways in righteousness,
And He anoints my head with oil,

And my cup, it overflows with joy,
I feast on His pure delights.

And though I walk the darkest path,
I will not fear the evil one,
For You are with me, and Your rod and staff
Are the comfort I need to know.

Prayers of Intercession

Holy Spirit, who moves within and among us,
around us and ahead,
we thank You for the fellowship we have in You.
You are the bond between us,
who breathes into the life of our community
that perfect unity of love that is one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Inspire us, we humbly pray,
that in the life that we share together as a community of faith, as Church,
people may know themselves loved as Jesus loves.

Lord, in Your mercy
Graciously hear us.

May we be communities of reconciliation,
seeking restorative justice, building bridges,
making connections, reaching out to others,
to the glory of Your holy name.
Especially we pray for people in challenging places;
in countries recovering from earthquake,
in places where there is war,
in situations where people have been hurt by the actions of others,
and where relationships are fractured.
God of peace,
may the love with which the Good Shepherd tends all the flock,
restore the image of God in us all.

Lord, in Your mercy
Graciously hear us.

Gracious God,
after whom every family on earth and heaven takes its name,

we thank You for deep relationships,
for opportunities to give and to receive,
to listen and hear what another is saying,
to serve one another and celebrate every kindness.
In moments of silence we bring to You now our thoughts and prayers
for those whom we, like the disciples, bring to Jesus today
that he might bless them.

Silence

Lord, in Your mercy
Graciously hear us.

On this the Sunday before the Coronation of King Charles III
we pray for His Majesty the King and for Camilla, the Queen Consort.
May Your Spirit be with them as they are affirmed in their responsibilities;
grant them joy and may many be encouraged by their interest and
concern.

We pray for all whose office and responsibilities affect the lives of many,
for those who represent their country's interests,
that in all they do they may be mindful of the wellbeing of every child of
God.

Lord, in Your mercy
Graciously hear us.

Jesus, Crucified, Risen and Ascended Lord,
You intercede for us before the throne of God,
thanks be to You!

Holy Spirit You, help us to pray in sounds too deep for words,
thanks be to You!

Creator of life, You call us to life anew;
thanks be to You!

These prayers we offer to the one in whom we live and move and have our
being,
to whom be all glory and praise. Amen

Hymn: Singing the Faith 323

1. I will sing the wondrous story
Of the Christ Who died for me;
How He left His home in glory
For the cross of Calvary.
 - *Refrain:*
Yes, I'll sing the wondrous story
Of the Christ Who died for me,
Sing it with the saints in glory,
Gathered by the crystal sea.
2. I was lost, but Jesus found me,
Found the sheep that went astray,
Threw His loving arms around me,
Drew me back into His way.
3. I was bruised, but Jesus healed me,
Faint was I from many a fall,
Sight was gone, and fears possessed me,
But He freed me from them all.
4. Days of darkness still come o'er me,
Sorrow's path I often tread,
But His presence still is with me;
By His guiding hand I'm led.
5. He will keep me till the river
Rolls its waters at my feet;
Then He'll bear me safely over,
Where the loved ones I shall meet.

The blessing of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be upon us and remain us for ever. Amen.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. In the name of Christ. Amen.