

The **Methodist** Church

Otley, Menston, & Burley in Wharfedale

Sunday 22nd November 2020

Deacon Jenny Parnell

Prayer

God our maker, you are here, Pouring love into our hearts,
that overflows to engulf others.
Jesus Christ you are here, understanding our offerings of love,
Even when others scoff or turn us away.
Spirit of Life, you are here within us, helping us to express our thanks
And to receive gifts of love without guilt or condemnation.
We are God's people, loved and cherished, whatever we have to offer. Amen
Revd A.K Heathcoat 'A Voice in the Wilderness, Finding God in Confusion.

Psalm 23

1 The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.
2 He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;
3 he restores my soul.
He leads me in right paths
for his name's sake.
4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I 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 mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
my whole life long.

Song- You never let go

Even though I walk through the valley of the
shadow of death
Your perfect love is casting out fear
And even when I'm caught in the middle of the
storms of this life
I won't turn back
I know You are near

And I will fear no evil
For my God is with me
And if my God is with me

Whom then shall I fear?
Whom then shall I fear?

Oh no, You never let go
Through the calm and through the storm
Oh no, You never let go
In every high and every low
Oh no, You never let go
Lord, You never let go of me

And I can see a light that is coming for the heart
that holds on
A glorious light beyond all compare
And there will be an end to these troubles
But until that day comes
We'll live to know You here on the earth

And I will fear no evil
For my God is with me
And if my God is with me... Matt Redmond

Reflection

If someone were to ask us who God is we may give answers like God is love, God is all powerful and yes God is those things but for me David in the Psalms gives us an image of God that we can hold on to in a more tangible way. Psalm 23 is a great example of this. David writes 'The Lord is my shepherd'. This description of God is personal, it is something that David could relate to. He had been a shepherd himself, so he knew how sheep were completely and utterly dependent upon their shepherds for survival.

When we think of shepherds and particularly think of green pastures, we automatically project our own understanding upon the scripture. We may picture in our minds eye rolling hills, green grass and lambs skipping in the fields. The scene is peaceful and comforting. Just for a moment I'd like us to park that image and think of Israel. The land where the shepherds tend their sheep there are fairly dry and barren. The hills are treacherously high causing deep valleys below. Perhaps you can see where this is going....

Sheep are dependent upon the shepherd to lead them to the tufts of grass that grow in the cracks of the rocks that cover the desert ground. The sheep rely upon their shepherd to lead them to the pools of water that form in the wilderness offering live giving refreshment. The sheep need the shepherd to anoint their heads with oil to keep the insects and bugs from infesting them and causing pain or even death. The sheep need the shepherd to protect them with a rod and rescue them with a staff. The sheep need the shepherd to guide them along the criss cross pattern of paths that have over the centuries been worn into the hills of the desert as shepherds have led sheep down the hills going around in circular movements rather than straight down at such a steep angle that could be disastrous.

David knew all this because he had lived it, he had been a shepherd and he could see how God cared for him like he would have cared for one of his flock. David now found himself in trouble. He had fled from Saul and whilst hiding in the desert he writes Psalms. He pours out his heart to God. His words demonstrate what a close and intimate relationship he has with his God.

He concludes Psalm 23 with the beautiful verse 'And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.'

How did he equate hiding in the desert with dwelling with God?

Maybe for us that is a difficult verse to understand given the circumstances but maybe it's easier to understand when we see the scripture through the eyes of David and his understanding of the desert or the wilderness.

When we think of our Christian lives we sometimes say or hear others speak of being in a desert place. We automatically think of feeling distanced from God or going through a hard time. Perhaps we're hurting, physically, emotionally, or spiritually. For us for the most part the desert place is somewhere to avoid somewhere we want to get out of as quickly as possible!

The desert is not portrayed like that in scripture though. The desert is a place where God met with people. It's a place where God spoke and interacted with people. Think of Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, John the Baptist, and Jesus himself they and others were led to the desert to spend time with God and

to hear what God had to say to them. For these people the desert place was a gift, an opportunity to spend time with God and to spend time dwelling in God's presence.

In Hebrew, the word for *desert* is 'midbar' and the word for *speak* is spelt the same but is pronounced 'medaber'. The desert place perhaps is a special place where we are invited to speak more intimately with God. Does that mean that we have to stay in the desert place? No but we should see the desert as a gift rather than something to be feared. So how do we dwell and stay close to God? Where is the house of God ?

In the Old Testament, the house of the Lord was the temple of God where the Israelites worshiped.

Ephesians 3:16-17 says: I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, ¹⁷ and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.

These words give us the reassurance that Christ dwells with us and in us. We can live in and with God's presence. It is a commitment to being comfortable enough in the presence of God to be your authentic self because that's what you do when you are home. When we have a shepherd-sheep relationship we take the presence of God with us. Not only will God's presence be with us on earth, but it will be our companion into death and forever. Jesus said, "And remember I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20). We can be confident that eternity will be an easy transition because we will be "home"- in the presence of God; a home we will recognize because we've already experienced it on earth. Amen

Song- Way maker

You are here, moving in our midst
I worship You
I worship You
You are here, working in this place
I worship You
I worship You
You are here, moving in our midst
I worship You
I worship You
You are here, working in this place
I worship You
I worship You

You are
Way maker, miracle worker, promise keeper
Light in the darkness
My God, that is who You are
You are
Way maker, miracle worker, promise keeper

Light in the darkness
My God, that is who You are

You are here, touching every heart
I worship You
I worship You
You are here, healing every heart
Healing every heart
Oh, I worship You
Jesus, I worship You
You're turning lives around
You are here, oh, turning lives around
I worship You
I worship You
You mended every heart
You are here, and You are mending every heart
I worship...
Sinach

Let us come before God in prayer:

In the Gospel of John, we read of how Jesus came to earth to dwell amongst us. You spoke, Lord, and light penetrated the darkness. A good light. A strong light. A perfect light. But we went astray, loving darkness rather than light, so you sent your prophets, to call us back towards the light. Yet still we were stubborn and afraid, so you sent your son, to be the light of the world. The light shining in the darkness, and the darkness never overcoming it. You, Lord, are our light and our salvation. You are our

light and our truth. You are our light and our protector. You are our light and our fountain of life. Your light continues to shine, in the dark places of our lives, in the dark places of our world and though things may not be easy, the darkness cannot prevail. We offer you the people and the situations which you have laid on our hearts . We thank you that you hear our prayers.

Amen

Song- Faithful One

Faithful one, so unchanging
Ageless one, you're my rock of peace
Lord of all I depend on you
I call out to you, again and again
I call out to you, again and again

You are my rock in times of trouble
You lift me up when I fall down
All through the storm
Your love is, the anchor
My hope is in You alone

Brian Doerksen

The Blessing

Loving God you have called us and brought light into our lives. And now you ask us to be your light in the continuing darkness. At times we may be like a small, fragile, flickering candle, at times a bright strong, beam of light... Help us this coming week to let your light shine through us in our words and our actions, in our attitudes and relationships. With our hands, our faces, our feet, and our smiles. In in the name of Jesus, Amen.