

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures;

he leads me beside still waters;^[a]

³ he restores my soul.^[b]

He leads me in right paths^[c]

for his name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk through the darkest valley,^[d]

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^[e] goodness and mercy^[f] shall follow me

all the days of my life,

and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD

my whole life long.^[g]

We know the phrase : A week is a long time in politics

New meaning – in fact **a day** is a long time in our response to CV19.

In our time poor lives TIME has been stretched out before us

In this new TIME there are new opportunities within new constraints.

Here In this moment stand in the presence of God together,

together with people who we carry in our hearts, particularly Daphne – those who usually sit beside us,

people who have gone before us, community, families, histories, people who are yet to be.

Last week we reviewed praying Lord's Prayer as a response to CV19 today we are going to look again at ancient text Psalm 23 so familiar.

But, as I have said many times, God speaks to us freshly through Scripture when we read or sing it Because our place- time is different- so true today.

Let's look at it.

Where does the light shine in this psalm

Attention to verse 4 : Even though I walk through the darkest valley,^[d]

I fear no evil; **for you are with me;**

IN KJV- it says Thou are with me - James Limburg points out that, in the original Hebrew of Psalm 23, there are exactly twenty six words before and after, "Thou art with me."¹

The cadence- the pattern of the poem the poet was spotlighting that **God being with us** is at the heart, centre, pivot of our lives.

God is *with* us. We are not alone here. Christmas condenses the good news into that phrase God is *with* us. Immanuel the rest of the year we unpack that – at this time of year, LENT we take courage from Jesus suffering, knows what it is to be isolated, thrown back onto his own thoughts and resources, he knows what it is like to be tested, to be stuck – Thursday of Holy Week he knows betrayal, disappointment: on Good Friday – pain. **AND** as people of Christ we rest in the amazement of resurrection and working out of Holy Spirit in our day to lives and existence. Resurrection is the historic location of our hope : place rubber hits road - at this time. Makes the difference between positive thinking and God's hope that is sourced in God's love that overcomes all things, including death.

We **are** in adversity, as this generation has never experienced before, rarely have baby boomer or Gen X,Y in NZ been told what they can or can't do, it's been about choice. If you want it, do it. Bing limited for the common good is unfamiliar territory – People are anxious. There is an Old Testament ring to it, people running here and there, where can we find safety. Psalm – we find safety in God. John Wesley's dying words were, "The best of all is, God is *with* us." God doesn't shelter us from trouble. God doesn't magically manipulate everything to suit us. But the glorious *with* is **unassailable, unchangeable**, that's the only fact that matters.²

Go back into the psalm let us look more closely at this pattern – verse 4 **You are with me** is in the middle. 1-3 leading in : God over there - "The Lord is my *shepherd... he leads me... he restores my soul.*" *After the pivot – second part* shift from He does x y to YOU restore my soul, you prepare table –

Do you notice the shift from about God TO God. We shift into language of relationship. From God in the head to God in a friend in the heart. Commentator I read said the A conversation happens, a relationship grows. This is faith, the only true comfort.³ If we flick back to verse 1 it is what God does that means that I **SHALL NOT WANT**

If we come back to our current gift of TIME – emptiness about it. When we have space - we usually fill it, with shopping, coffee, activity.

¹ James Howell, Working Preacher. Commentary

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

Many of these things just aren't available now– the advertisers and people who want our money make sure that our whole life is about wanting from childhood. Choose what you want – give children choice. In our consumer culture, it's never

I shall NOT want it's I **shall** want, I shall always want. I shall never stop all my wanting because I am seduced with new, shiny, unnecessary objects.⁴ We live in a deficit culture , it's not what you have but what other people have.

We grow dissatisfaction with our lives – because we are deeply privileged compared with 4/5 world we have right to change, be in control. CV 19 shows us we can not control. Calls us to evaluate our attitudes.

NOW – in this TIME we have been given we are facing space, many props are taken away and priorities are brought into question.

Now we have TIME and can't rush about what can we do, what carries us through these times?

1. Stop and look – recognise and absorb what Lord my shepherd mean.

TIME without urgency to reflect and the turn around is already beginning, people are noticing change. Relationships rather than possessions or trophy experiences.

That's repentance- change direction, new perspective, like the man – eyes open and could see.

2. Kindness, George Dingle asked me once to preach on kindness, Jacinda Ardern got there first, it's the first tile on CV Govt website – be kind to one another, she says : unite, be strong. The difference for us as Christians is that we know that these things are GIFTS. We love because we are loved, we are kind because God's inexhaustible kindness pours through us.

3. BC – Before Corona – we were time poor, always busy. Now we have time and imagination to develop intimacy, deepen relationships, people and God.

Many of us heard need to deepen relationships before – but we have never heard it in this unknown territory. Emptiness of our diaries means we are thrown back into relationship with people we live with or avoided.

I am not naïve about families- we need to learn to be kind together, to learn to be intimate, to develop new patterns without pressure of activities. Backdrop of stress - acknowledge each person, give them space to speak and be heard,

Don't rubbish their feelings and make it hard for them unlike the man born blind who was healed in our NT reading, most people will give up!

Give space to people who live alone – creative ways to listen to them in this stress filled situation.

⁴ Ibid.

Listen for where we can support groups of concern, a particular group that I pray for are children whose homes are unsafe – lets develop imagination in prayer and listen up for ways to support.

4. How are we going to keep our efforts alive as this period stretches out into unknown future.

Simple beginning : use simple order of prayer to keep us on track: on website or in prayer book. We will make these available.

Draw on ancient traditions of Christian faith, websites, music.

Support each other, in ways that we can't yet imagine.

I believe that like the rivers becoming clean in Venice and the air in Wuhan God will sprinkle joy and new things will become visible :

like the blind man we will SEE in a different way : things will probably never be the same again

I am coming to an end

If "you are with me" is the focal point of the Psalm, and if "I shall not want" is the beginning of a new life of being satisfied with God v1 then the end of our life with God is this: "I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Last verse.⁵

Just as getting home is pressure at this time : HOME in biblical sense is wherever God is.... May this time grow this confidence.

The **force quit** of this virus is giving us opportunity to dwell with God, recover patterns of prayer and devotion, to serve in new and imaginative ways

As Time opens up before us – **let's keep praying and keep talking.**

A prayer by Barbara Glasson :

We are not people of fear:
we are people of courage.
We are not people who protect our own safety:
we are people who protect our neighbours' safety.
We are not people of greed:
we are people of generosity.
We are your people God,
giving and loving,
wherever we are,
whatever it costs
For as long as it takes
wherever you call us.⁶

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Barbara Gleeson <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-liturgy-and-prayer-resources>