

Sunday Sermon

Revd Canon Charles Jenkin – Sunday 25th April 2021

Psalm 23; Acts 4.5-12; John 10.11-18

Psalm 23 is one of the best loved texts of the Bible. It speaks powerfully of the psalmist's confidence in God; that the one who calls people to challenging lives of loving service and personal sacrifice in building the Kingdom of God, will also provide times of renewal and refreshment and comfort; times that are absolutely essential to being able to fulfil that calling to the Kingdom. Psalm 23 speaks vividly of the psalmist's personal experience of divine loving care. The Lord is my shepherd, therefore I will lack nothing of real value. In many ways, this is one of the key features of the Kingdom of God.

It is therefore illuminating to place these words on the lips and in the heart of Jesus, the king of the Kingdom, both before and after his resurrection. He was of course deeply familiar with the psalms; we know from the gospels how much he found personal resonances in them. Indeed the Psalms were a vital part of what inspired Jesus. So it is no flight of fancy to imagine Jesus himself praying the words of Psalm 23; as he planned and sustained his ministry; as he contemplated his journey to the Cross; and as he reflected on the vindication of his resurrection.

“You have prepared a table for me in the face of those that oppose me. You have anointed my head with oil, and my cup shall be full. Your loving-kindness and mercy follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.” These are surely resurrection words too.

Psalm 23 works at many levels; when facing challenges, when exhausted by troubles, when dealing with loss, when facing death, when giving thanks for deliverance, and when drawing on the strength and comfort of God. The psalm is both a celebration and a promise. The Lord is my shepherd, therefore I will lack nothing of real value.

So for Jesus, Psalm 23 is also about his own personal experience of God; of being a child of God, an experience into which he invites all of us. This is an experience that held profoundly true for Jesus at every stage of his life and ministry and death and resurrection, and which can also be true for every single one of us too; if we do not lose faith, if we do not give up on God, if we stay the course.

Then in St John's gospel Jesus goes on to say also that he also is the Good Shepherd. Of course, what better training to be a good shepherd, than being ministered to yourself by a good shepherd! Not only does Jesus know personally what it means to have faith in God as his good shepherd, but he now says that his followers can discover the same kind of relationship with himself. That in their journeys to discover God's good purposes for their lives, they can know Jesus as their good shepherd; as the one who will guide them, and strengthen them, and comfort them, and vindicate them. And as the one who will refresh them, and who will lead them by still waters.

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It is certainly true that Jesus calls each one of us to things which are a challenge to us, which stretch us in all sorts of ways, including spiritually. But he also provides those vital times of refreshment and renewal to sustain us, the quiet waters. The important thing is to make sure we take those opportunities when they are given us. Amen.

CJ. 25.4.21