


Sunday 20th September 2020



Giffnock:
the Park Church

Welcome to our
Time for Reflection

*Even though I walk through the
darkest valley, I will fear no evil,
Ps 23: 4*

Good Morning everyone,

Welcome to another 'Time for Reflection'. I can tell you that Wilma and I had a most enjoyable week up North exploring parts of Scotland we had not been too for a long time as well as places to which we have never been before. The weather was as it always is in Scotland - changeable. The week that has past has seen a number of things happen where in celebration of the end of the Battle of Britain, they sent a World War 2 Spitfire across Scotland with "Thank U NHS" painted on the underside of the aircraft so that as it flew across the Queen Elizabeth Hospital here in Glasgow, everyone could look up and see this. I don't often make statements that are political in nature but as much as I love to see these old Aircraft in flight, I cannot help but think that those in Parliament should have taken a leaf out of the Book of Industry in giving a one off bonus for all in our NHS staff and let us not forget those many thousand workers in the Social Care Sector who still remain the unsung and at times unspoken of heroes looking after our Elderly and Infirm.

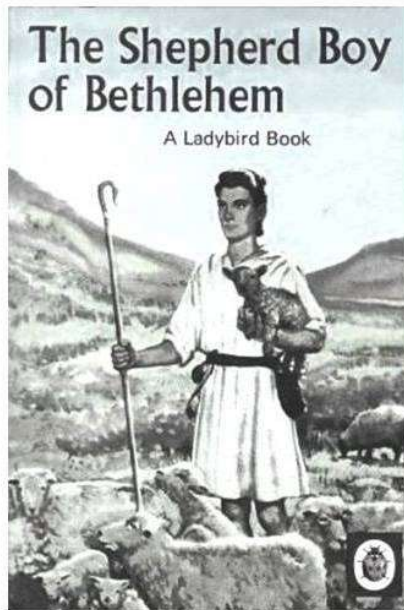
Sunday 20th September at 11am is a pivotal time because we will also be opening the doors for the first time since March for a service of Reflection and Prayer. Our service will not be the same as we have been used to. We will not be able to sing these marvellous hymns and choruses just yet but we will be able to gather together again to Reflect on God's Word to us in these times and Pray not just for ourselves but for others.

If you have not already done so, Please remember to Phone Bert Dickov to intimate your intention to come and pass on your phone number for Track and Trace purposes. (Bert's Phone No is 07947611412) You will be required to wear a mask, use the Hand Sanitizer as you come in, and someone will show you to a designated and socially distanced place in one of our pews. There will be a one way system in place allowing entry via the church door and exit by either the Rear Car Park Door or the Hall Vestibule. I want to thank Bert and Hebba and all who have sought to be available to help.

Of course, All of this is conditional on the story of coming out of Lockdown continuing and as we all know, the latest news is that those in national leadership are looking very nervously at rising trends and rates in infection. We can only wait and see how things transpire and adapt accordingly.

As always I would want folk to know that if there is any assistance I can offer in these more unpredictable times, then please don't hesitate to get in touch.(Email: parkhoose@msn.com or phone the manse on 0141 638 3023) In the meantime, as we look to the week ahead, I hope it will be a good one for you.

With best wishes
Calum D. Macdonald



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“God shapes the World by Prayer. The more praying there is in the world, the better the world will be, the mightier the forces against Evil”

E.M. Bounds

Let us pray

Father in Heaven as we come before you in the silence of our thoughts and solitude of our homes, contending with the fear and the worries that these times bring, hear us once more as we come into your presence to remind ourselves that You are Our Rock upon which your Work is Perfect and all your ways are Just. You are the One who is Faithful, Good and True and we acknowledge that there are times we have found it hard to remain faithful good and true; that we suffer from the pride of arrogance and self sufficiency at times. We follow our own self interest and satisfaction and become easily deluded into thinking that we no longer want You or need You, we even think we know better than You. Gracious God help us to see through our superstitions and the lies that we tell ourselves and are told by others. All too often we are led by our wants and not our necessities

In acknowledging your Greatness we once again confess our weakness before You and concede our failure to be faithful, good and true and seek your Grace and Favour once more. We recognise afresh that none of this would be possible without Jesus, the Rock of our Salvation, the gift of Your Son. In your forgiveness may we see the light of your love shed abroad in our hearts once more. May we have a willingness to serve and

follow the example of our Saviour as a new week begins. May we bring
Glory, honour and praise to your name as we do so.

While we remember the need for Grace in our own lives we think also
those whose needs are greater than our own. Draw near to all in who are
or have been in hospital at this time, those who are looking to recover
from surgery or treatment or are about to endure surgery or treatment.
Be to them the rock upon which they can stand and endure all things. Be
with their loved ones and friends who look anxiously on and be for them
the Rock upon which they can lean.

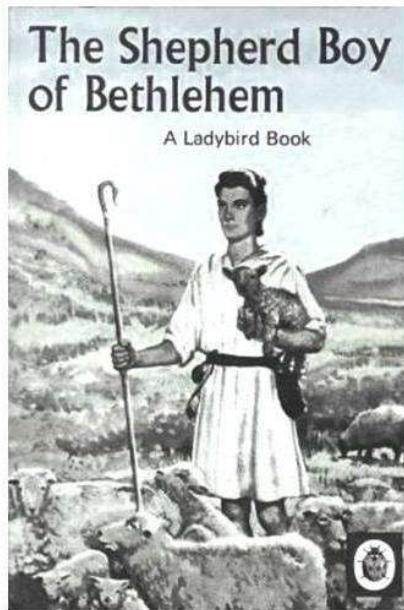
We pray for all who have responsibility for leading the nation at this
time, that they be faithful in discharging the duty of Care for the
Nation. Where they demonstrate self sacrifice and a neglect of self
interest, may they know your blessing, and where they fulfil their own
needs at the expense of those who are weaker and more vulnerable than
themselves, may they know your judgement this day.

We pray for all at this time who are struggling with all that is going on in
their lives, those with addictions, those under pressure in the work place,
or in marital dispute, those anxious about what tomorrow may hold, ill
health or unemployment, homelessness or financial ruin. Whatever their
circumstance, Father in Heaven, be near to them and be the Rock to
which they can cling.

For Your Church at this time, facing an uncertain future with
congregations unclear as to how best to deal with these Covid19 times,
for those congregations in Vacancy, those unclear of their future
continuance, be a reassuring presence, we pray. For ourselves as a
congregation and as individual members of this congregation, help us to
contend with all that is happening round about us and in so doing, it is our
prayer that we be a heartfelt witness to those in our families, those who
are our neighbours and friends, that in the Saviour who loved each one of
us and gave himself for us, they see our faith as real and relevant for
every moment of life both today and for the days to come.

This we pray in Jesus' name

Amen



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Psalm 23: 4

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me, your rod and staff, they comfort me

Matthew 4: 12 - 17

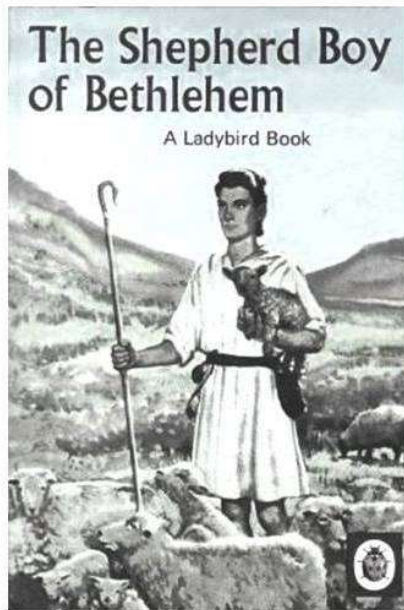
Jesus begins to Preach

When Jesus heard that John the Baptist had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee. Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali – to fulfil what was said through the prophet Isaiah.


“Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali the way to the sea, along the Jordan. Galilee of the Gentiles. –The people living in Darkness have seen a great light; on those living on the shadow of Death a light has dawned”

From that time on Jesus began to preach

“Repent, for the Kingdom of God is near.”



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Psalm 23 remains one of the most well known and well loved psalms of all time. It sits as the front runner of hymns to sing on the occasion of a funeral and at the heart of the reason behind that sits the verse that we will consider this week as we continue to look at the story of the 23rd Psalm and Verse 4 in particular.

*“Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil,
for You are with me, Your Rod and Your Staff they comfort me.”*

In McCaw and Motyer's Commentary on the Psalms, they write that God is our "Guide and Protector through the vicissitudes of life" Professor David Dixon, a 17th century reformation theologian describes the Psalm as the ultimate expression of "confidence in God's Grace." CH Spurgeon describes these words as having "a piety and poetry that is equal" and a sweetness and spirituality that is "unsurpassed". These great Commentators recognised the treasure of this great Psalm .

In Matthew's Gospel our Short reading takes us into that moment where Jesus has successfully completed his trial before Satan after 40 days and nights in the desert. Jesus mirrors the thoughts of the Psalmist in verse 16 of our reading;

*“The people living in Darkness have seen a great light;
on those living on the shadow of Death a light has dawned”*

From that moment Jesus proclaims a message that becomes his By Word - **"the Kingdom of God is Near."** By the time of the Resurrection the message changes to "the Kingdom of God Being at Hand." Paul the Apostle, had that sense of immediacy when he said, "Now is the accepted time and now is the day of Salvation".

The New International Version of the Bible highlights the difference in understanding the Hebrew because it can be read in several ways. The Old King James Bible describes Ps 23:4 as the valley of the Shadow of Death, hence the reason why so many people associate the hymn so often sung to the tune of Crimmond with the Story of Grief and mourning as a family contends with the death of a loved one.

Other versions of Bible help us understand these words in a broader context when it speaks of "walking through the darkest valley". It helps us understand that this could be a veiled reference not just to death but also, illness (terminal illness, mental or other physically disabling illness), or going through the dark place of war and conflict. Someone once said "there are no atheists in a foxhole".

A Hymn we so often associate with grief and the death of a loved one is that of 'O Love that will not let me go'. It is said that the Hymn writer was going through one of the deepest and blackest times of his life. Perhaps it was reading the words of Ps 23 : 4 or perhaps verses from Ps 139, where the psalmist asks the question 'where can I go from your Spirit?', that he realises that there was no distance, no height and no depth to which he could go, that God was not already there. It is said that in that moment the words of the Hymn flowed onto the page in such a short time and we have a treasure that we can now sing (A treasure that many find difficult to sing at times because of the memories brought forward through doing so) ...

VS1

O love that Will not let me go,
I rest my weary Soul in Thee:
I give Thee Back the life I owe,
That in the Ocean's depths its flow
May richer Fuller be

Vs3

O Joy that sleekest me through Pain,
I cannot close my eyes to Thee:
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
And feel the promise is not Vain,
that morn shall tearless be

There was a Reason for the Hymn writer and the psalmist to feel this way and it comes on the shape of these reassuring Words in Ps23: 4 "For You are with me" These 5 words which lie at the centre of what the Psalmist is trying to say are I think vitally critical words for our time. Perhaps we know a loved one in hospital or in a care Home who we are unable to visit, then Ps 23:4 is a word in season for them being reminded of God's Promise - I am with You. These can be words can bring hope to those who are in the deepest and blackest place of depression. It is a reassurance through our Faith in Jesus that we are not alone and because of the promise "I am with You".

Even in these times of isolation from our friends and families as we face lockdown restrictions, etc we can be reassured to know that we will not be on our own, - for He is with us.

I have often wondered why the rod and staff were a comfort. Spurgeon refers to the Rod and staff being "ensigns of God's Sovereignty and Gracious Care". I would prefer to understand it as the walkers' companions. When out on the Hills with one of our Hill walking members John Craig I would often take with me two walking sticks which I at times relied on for being "my Rod and Staff" as I would lean on them both for coming down the mountain side particularly in high winds and rain as well as contending with boggy soft water filled ground in order to stay upright. My Rod and Staff were the means by which I could keep going. For the Christian, the Word of God and the Spirit of God are the rod and staff that can keep us upright. That can keep us on the right path as we come down the mountain's difficult track. Perhaps that is an image that we can take from the 23rd Psalm too where the Shepherd leaned on his rod and staff at times. Spurgeon was right to say that every word of the Psalm has a wealth of meaning and I trust that in reading these words today that maybe a little of that wealth might have come through in our reflection of Psalm 23 verse 4.

I hope these words serve to encourage and remind us all that we are not alone, that He is with us always and that Jesus additional words endorse that even further in the closing words of Matthews Gospel in the great Commission," And Surely I will be with you always even to the end of the age" Have a great week despite all that's going on with worries about Covid19.

Calum D. Macdonald

May

God's love surround you,

God's Spirit guide you,

God's whisper cheer you,

God's peace calm you,

God's shield protect you,

God's wisdom arm you,

wherever God may lead you.

May you know the Blessing

Of his Grace,

Mercy & Peace

Amen

