

Giffnock: the Park Church

*A
Time
for
Reflection*



*Sunday
6th
September
2020*

"He guides me along the right paths"

Psalm 23:3

Good morning everyone,
Welcome to the month of September and I hope you are all well. Who would have thought when this all began that we would still be in this situation today? Awareness of this super bug began to arise in January, with a deeper concern about its impact on the world in February culminating in our country entering a period of strict Lockdown in March that has brought us to this point now in September nearly 6 months on.

The good news is that despite East Renfrewshire being placed in a slightly stricter lockdown to hopefully slow down the number of positive cases that worryingly continue to rise, here in the church, we can still proceed with our preparations for coming out of Lockdown having undertaken a Deep Clean of our facilities and instated new protocols, sanitising points and signage. Further to that some of our Hall using organisations have sought to kick-start their new session albeit under stricter protocols and hopefully these are the shoots of life coming back into our Church again.

Our Kirk Session has agreed that we begin to do things on a Sunday again and we can look forward to more specific Information

about when we will do this, how we observe the current measures in place and what will happen on Sunday mornings because it will still not be the same as before.

Information will be issued to all members either by email or by letter depending on whether you are on one list or the other. You may also be interested to know that the decision was also taken to continue with both our video reflections and also our written reflections in order to continue to maintain contact with as many as we can when things hopefully settle down, particularly those who less able to be in Church. So keep an eye on your inbox or letterbox, in the coming days of next week and in the interim, I hope you have a good week and enjoy this written reflection continuing our study of Psalm 23.

With best Wishes from all at the Manse.

Calum D. Macdonald

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Let us pray...

Loving Heavenly Father, as we come to You in the quietness of our homes and stillness of the moment, we would seek to remember who it is, in whose presence we are. We remind ourselves that you are the one who sits on the throne of Creation itself, throwing the stars into space and bringing worlds, even our world into place. We look to the mountains and see you are there, we marvel at the depth of the oceans seeing you are there and when we look to the farthest reaches of the Universe - we recognise You are there and as such, we are left with a sense of Awe and Wonder at Who you are and what You can do.

Our Father as we consider the depth of your love for us, your deep interest in us and your awareness of all aspects of our lives, we are left even more amazed. As we are reminded of your word that says that "before we were formed in the womb, you knew us" and when we consider that such was the love that you had for us that you gifted to the World Your Son and our Saviour Jesus, we are left lost for words but with a heart that is grateful, that seeks to offer our thanks and praise.

Lord Jesus We thank you for the life you lived, the things you did, the example you set for us to follow, but most of all, for the sacrifice that you made and the victory that you achieved once and for all over death itself. You have turned our story from one of Despair to one of Celebration and we pray that we might be more like You, able to remain loving to all whom we

come in contact with; that we are faithful in our service and devotion to You and our Father in Heaven and we pray that you might reveal yourself to others through us as we seek to offer wise words and caring hands in Your name.

Be with those who are our loved ones this day, with those who grieve for loved ones lost in death. Be with those who sit anxiously by waiting for news of loved ones in hospital, Be with those whose future is uncertain as a consequence of lost employment, Be with those who have suffered from the impact of war and other horrors Humanity must bear responsibility for.



"We have to pray with our eyes on God, not on the difficulties."
— Oswald Chambers

Help us our gracious God to see Your Spirit at work in a Broken World where we all have sinned and fallen short of your glory. Forgive us when we fail to show Your love to others. Forgive us when we stifle your ever-creating Spirit in our lives or in the lives of others. Forgive us when we fail to allow others to shine, and when we make light of your gifts to us. By your love this day Restore us, Renew us, Refresh us we pray - prepare us for the week that lies ahead as we give thanks for the week that has gone by and help us to see that You have gone before us, that You come behind us and that You are ever beside us.

As the marvel of all this dawns upon us, we are left with one thing to do - To thank You and to Praise you in Jesus Name.

Amen

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Bible Reading: John 10: 1-15

The Parable of the Shepherd

*10 Jesus said, "I am telling you the truth: the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in some other way, is a thief and a robber. ² The man who goes in through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ The gatekeeper opens the gate for him; **the sheep hear his voice as he calls his own sheep by name, and he leads them out.** ⁴ When he has brought them out, **he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him, because they know his voice.** ⁵ **They will not follow someone else; instead, they will run away from such a person, because they do not know his voice.**"*

⁶ Jesus told them this parable, but they did not understand what he meant.

Jesus the Good Shepherd

⁷ So Jesus said again, "I am telling you the truth: I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All others who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the gate. Those who come in by me will be saved; they will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only in order to steal, kill, and destroy. I have come in order that you might have life—life in all its fullness.

¹¹ "I am the good shepherd, who is willing to die for the sheep. ¹² When the hired man, who is not a shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees a wolf coming, he leaves the sheep and runs away; so the wolf snatches the sheep and scatters them. ¹³ The hired man runs away because he is only a hired man and does not care about the sheep. ¹⁴⁻¹⁵ I am the good shepherd. As the Father knows me and I know the Father, in the same way I know my sheep and they know me. And I am willing to die for them.

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This is the third of six reflections based on the words of the 23rd Psalm and in completing verse 3 here we come to the middle of the psalm where the image and metaphor begins to change from that of the Shepherd to the Feast Table and the Host. Whenever I read the 23rd Psalm and verses 2&3 especially, I probably like so many others, cannot help but think of the New Testament Gospel of John 10: 1-15 where he recounts the time when Jesus used the image of the Shepherd as he spoke in the parable to his disciples, saying "I am the Good Shepherd". Another bible verse that quickly comes to my mind is also found in the Psalms, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119: 105). It is almost poetic, the way the Bible's Authorised Version puts it. There are two obvious images that arise from Psalm 23 and John 10 which I think helps us to understand these words better.

There is the image of what a shepherd does. Here in Scotland our approach is slightly different from that of the Middle East which is still very much the practice all these years on from the days of Jesus in Israel & Palestine. As a boy on holiday on the Isle of Lewis I have a faint memory as a young boy going out with an uncle to gather the sheep from the moors and to take them to the Sheep fank either for disinfection or for sheep shearing (cutting the wool off the sheep) and with the Sheep herd in front of us, my uncle would walk behind usually flanked by one or two sheep dogs who would corral the sheep together until we got to the Sheep Pen all the while hearing

my uncle give instructions to both the Sheep and to the dogs either by voice commands,(usually in Gaelic) or signal by whistle.

In the Mediterranean and Middle East, the Shepherd would lead from the front and he would call his sheep to follow him and as he would speak or sing or shout commands, the sheep would hear his voice and follow him. Jesus tapped into that very common image to try and teach his disciples about Discipleship. John's Gospel says that Jesus patiently tried to get them to understand a second time because they did not quite get what he was saying. I truly take heart from these words and say to all of us, there is truly hope for us all when we can see Jesus' patience with our lack of understanding.

The second image to help us understand Ps23:3 and John 10: 4-5 is that of a Scripture Union Team game. Imagine, if you will, that there is an assault course laid out in the church hall and the idea is that one person is blindfolded and expected to navigate his or her way around the assault course from one end of the hall to the other without coming in contact with the objects in front of them. To assist them, one person is appointed to shout commands as to what direction to take and what objects are before them. Now that sounds all too easy but then you have to add into the mix that there are 15 other voices all shouting different things at the same time as the one trying to guide you. The person blindfolded has to be able to tune in to that one voice that will steer them in the right direction and not be distracted by the clamour and confusion of other voices. It's a game that's great fun to watch and the kids usually go home that night hoarse from all their shouting. The lesson of the story is of course very obvious. Amidst all the chaos of different instructions and attempts to distract one-self from completing the course, there is one voice that we can trust and listen to even amidst the clamour of noise all round about us.

How applicable that illustration is for us today. There is so much to distract us from hearing God's voice and following that voice now more than ever before. It is a voice that we should always be listening for so that we might know which is the best way forward. So the first lesson in PS 23:3 is that "He guides us" and we should listen for that voice either through his Word or by the sense of that Holy Hunch where the Spirit of God speaks to us or from the wise counsel of our fellow believers who have been on the journey before us which is why it is important to also be part of a church fellowship.

The second thing about PS 23: 3 is that we are guided to the right path. In the book 'the Pilgrim's Progress', an allegory of the Christian Life by John

Bunyan he speaks of how Christian (the person in the Book) must find himself back onto the King's Highway. The older bible versions speak of the Paths of Righteousness, - "He leadeth me in the paths of Righteousness". The question is what is a path of Righteousness, indeed, what is righteousness? A

Dictionary definition of righteousness would say that it is **"behaviour that is morally justifiable or right and that such behaviour is characterised by accepted standards of morality, justice, virtue, or uprightness"**. The one question that arises for all of this is "Who sets the bar of achievement in righteousness? We have seen people's sense of morality, justice and virtue gradually change over the last 40 years. What was Moral, Just and virtuous then, is not acceptable now. To whom do we hold the candle of Righteousness as the ultimate bar of comparison?

We are told in the gospel accounts to "seek first God's Kingdom and his righteousness". For the Christian, they will look to Gods' Word, the Bible, which sees the standard of human righteousness as something measured by God's own perfection in every attribute, every attitude, behaviour, and every word. Therefore, what the bible says describes God's own character and constitutes the plumb line by which God measures human righteousness. So when Paul the apostle wrote that we have "all sinned and fallen short of His Glory" (Romans 3:23), he meant that there is no means by which we could ever reach that standard. Martin Luther came to launch the Great Protestant Reformation on the realisation that there was nothing that we could do in and of ourselves that would merit God's Favour. There could be no-one of such upstanding character, no-one whose virtuosity or sense of Justice or whose moral fibre could stand flawlessly alongside that of God's. That it is now and has always been from the day that Jesus rose from the tomb, a case of, "there but for the Grace of God Go I". Luther realising that moment conceived the idea that we are 'Justified by Faith Alone' and nothing else. So when Jesus said, "I am the way the truth and the life, no-one comes to the Father except through me" - he meant it. Christian Faith is the sole means of securing our lives with God. There is no other. He guides us in the Right Paths - He leads us in the paths of Righteousness.

The closing words of PS 23 verse 3 finishes with, "for His Name's Sake". It's an expression I have heard throughout the course of my life uttered often by those least interested in anything to do with the church or what it would say. I have even heard it from the lips of those who are confirmed Atheists. They all have at one time exclaimed, "for God's sake!" or "for Christ's sake!" It was always a negative expression uttered in anger or

frustration and of course breached the Old Testament Command, "You shall not take the Lord's name in Vain." (Exodus 20:7) More positively, in church we will often say "for Jesus' sake" usually in the context of closing a prayer. But what does "For His Name's sake" mean and why is it at the end of that statement?

In answer to this, I would suggest that his desire and love for us is such that he seeks to lead us to the right Path because it is an attitude born out of the very character and nature of his love to seek that Humanity comes back to Him. It is not just his nature though, He is also fulfilling his promise and maintaining his Word, "I will never leave you nor forsake You" (Hebrews 13:5), because it continues to reflect who He is and what He is like. It is therefore not only for our benefit but also fulfils everything he is and stands for - it is "for His name's sake."

Who would have thought that we could learn so much from two such short but important statements made by one who would eventually rise to be the next King of Israel not realising his writing was inspired by the penmanship of God Himself.

Have a great Week.
Calum



May each day be blessed by moments of quietness,

*May we see the light of His Love
in times of darkness,*

*May we find the strength of God
when contending with weakness,*

*May His Grace, Mercy & Peace
Guard over each one and*

*May the Love of God our Father,
and his Son, Jesus Christ*

*with the abiding Presence of His Spirit
Keep You now and always*

