

[Here again is something in place of Sunday Worship while a gathering together is still unfeasible and church services are suspended due to the corona virus outbreak.

The Lord lives and is the same, yesterday, today and for ever: In his name and for his sake this meditation on Ps.23 is offered – may it please him to bless it.

“Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the LORD is good and his love endures for ever, his faithfulness continues through all generations.” - Ps.100]

1Pt.1, 2-4:

Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.

The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. 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. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever. – Psalm 23

Dear friend

If you know Jesus Christ and call on him as your Lord, you will know what Isaiah meant, and Peter too quoting him in his epistle to the church, when he said: *“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way.”* (Is.53, 6/1Pt.2, 25) Because you now recognise it in the life you led before you came to Christ. Factually true before you knew him, you now see more clearly and more deeply that and how it was just so. Your journey to Christ may have begun when and *because* you realised that you were lost in some way. Or it may be that you found Christ and *then* began to realise the extent of your having “gone astray”. Either way, how truly this “going astray like sheep” applies to us and in how many ways our lives manifest it, has become evident and clearer as you looked at things through the lens of God’s word and supremely Jesus Christ on the cross. In fact, even now that you are a Christian you continue to discover how this metaphor of ‘sheep turning to our own way’ still applies, and this keeps you in need of the Shepherd who laid down his life for you.

Psalms 23 with its imagery of sheep longing for green pasture, threatened on all sides, having to manage difficult terrain and arid places, and a shepherd who is eminently good to his sheep and guides them with a sure hand to green pastures and along the right paths, manages to capture a sense which many people find expresses the sense they have of their own life and situation in it. Mirrored in it appear our experiences of how fragile life is and prone to disorder, of uncertainty about what lies ahead and exposure to all kinds of dangers and risks, of how we all search for the right way, always targeted by forces that push and pull us to where in the end we do not want to be. There appear also our longings and questions, for answers and for certainty: Who will lead us and whom shall we follow? In the dark valleys – are we in the end alone? Or who is with us? Is this the way I’m meant to be on and which leads to life? What and where are the “green pastures and quiet waters” we long for? What threatens us and puts them beyond our reach? What holds me and watches over me come what may?

In times such as we are now going through, we may find that these words once again speak more distinctly into our ears and search the heart. The uncertainty we have been thrown into may lay bare to us once again the significance of these words and the one they point to.

Who is the Lord? This indeed is the question, because he is the shepherd! Those whose shepherd he is are not shepherd-less! However helpless the sheep may be in themselves and in the world, however helplessly they may be lost or get lost, they are not without their

helper nor without his strength and gracious guiding to see them through and safe. It is indeed all a matter of who the shepherd is and of being able to say: “The Lord is *my* shepherd”.

Who is the shepherd? In Jn.10 we hear of one who will say “*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep*” – Jesus Christ. But before he does, in the same context, he speaks of “robbers and thieves”. That is, he speaks of those who offer themselves to you as shepherds, who make sure you have no need for the “good shepherd” and should not belong to him but to them; who want you to see them as being in the know about the right way and how to reach the “green pastures”, who claim your faith and your hope – only, however, by this way to rob you of everything that the good shepherd who knows the way means for you to have! When shepherding costs, when it becomes a matter of sacrificially taking the place of the sheep to ward off danger, these shepherds will drop you like a hot potato and run. To entrust ourselves to those who are not the good shepherd as though they were; to entrust ourselves to them with our soul, with life’s progress and outcome, blessing and fruit; to disregard over their words, their ideas, boasts and claims, to listen to *his* voice - is to leave ourselves helpless in the dark valley, without the hand that yields the life giving power of the shepherd’s “rod and staff” (=the word of God), shut up once more to uncertainty, fear and the fragile state of a self-ordered life, strangers to life’s fullness and to hope, with no table prepared for us in the presence of the enemy that is sin and death (those powers of disorder!), and when our days are numbered, complete like a river at the point of joining the sea, there is no flowing into the glorious Day of the Shepherd, the longing and desire of the sheep. Robbers and thieves indeed! Rightly does Jesus warn of them as a great menace to the sheep. Shepherds though they may pretend to be, *good* they are not. One is – the Lord.

“*I am the good shepherd*”, says Jesus. “*And the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*” Here, dear friend, is the great invitation to all, ready for faith to pick up and follow, to know the truth of which Psalm 23 speaks, to know the comfort and own the vision that lie within it. Here is the entry point, the gate through which one enters into life with the one who is the Lord, who laid down his life and rose from the dead, who is with us in the darkest valley so we need fear no evil and whose goodness and love shall follow us all the days of

our life and ensure that we “*may have life, and have it to the full*” (Jn.10, 10), yes, shall dwell in his house for ever. AMEN

“Lord, we come before you with joyful hearts, acknowledging that you are God. It is you who made us, and we are yours, your people, the sheep of your pasture.

In your mercy help us to hear and discern your voice amidst the noises in and around us so that in all the fear and perplexity we encounter on the way we are guided to your peace and in your strength to your joy. Amen. “

[Intercede before God on behalf of others – thinking of the troubles our times are facing, of the help needed, of the prayer our Lord taught us, and bringing all our concerns before God with thanksgiving]

Hebr.13, 20-21:

Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.
