

The Fourth Sunday of Easter

Kept Safe

[Psalm 23](#) and [John 10: 1-10](#)

The Bible offers us a such a rich diet of readings, and today's Psalm and Gospel passage are a particularly spectacular banquet. Do take time to read them and meditate upon them during this week. They are so familiar, yet I am sure they will speak to you afresh during this time when we are following our instructions to stay home and to keep our distance.

If you are able to go out for a walk in our beautiful countryside, you will often reach gates. They are an essential way of keeping people and things safe. We need to ensure that the vulnerable members of our families are kept away from dangers: we put up stairgates to stop toddlers from coming to harm in the home, as well as keeping gates to the streets closed against the hazards of busy traffic and the risk of getting lost. We must close gates behind us when out in the country in order to protect grazing animals and growing crops.

Gates can also be exciting invitations to adventure: doorways and gateways are places of mystery between our everyday world and new horizons; they can set us free just as much as they hem us in.

And is being hemmed in such a bad thing? Look at the first and last verses of Psalm 23. The person who is at both the beginning and end of the Psalm is "The Lord." All the different situations in which the Psalmist is being guided are bounded by God.

This doesn't mean that life will be a totally beautiful, safe place without suffering. Yet there are "green pastures" and "quiet waters": places for deep rest and recuperation. We can gain that nourishment from a range of sources; notice that it's not just one pasture, or one stream in the Psalm. You may find that different things support you at this time, whether it's finding time to pray more during the day, reading, listening to music, looking at the beauty of nature around us or simply learning to be still and feeding on the quietness rather than our usual round of busy-ness.



The Psalmist does not describe living in a world free from death and suffering. "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death." Death casts a shadow across us, and we suffer grief at loss. We know people who are mourning the loss of a loved one today, and we are all grieving the

loss of our freedom, suffering as the shadow of death hangs over our world. However, that phrase, “Even though..” is so powerful, because it reminds us that we are not alone, and this shadow will pass. God shepherds us – sometimes with a sharp reminder with his rod and staff as much as they are also evidence of his gentle, calming presence that he is keeping us safe, keeping watch over us so that we can thrive, even in the midst of the shadows.

The Psalm gives us such a strong picture of the loving, constant nature of God, shepherding us before and behind. Is it therefore any wonder that His Son, Jesus, should not speak in similar terms?



In one of his “I am” descriptions in John’s Gospel, he says in verses 7 and again in verse 9, “I am the gate”. He keeps us safe from danger, but also offers the freedom to “come in and go out, and find pasture.” (v. 9) He does not simply keep us shut in, missing out on all the excitements in life. Rather, he makes it possible for those who trust him to have access to better things, to the good pasture; just like in Psalm 23.

Even when we may feel like the shadows over us are long and life is being limited in all kinds of ways, Jesus promises: “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” (v. 10)

Take time to rest with these passages from the Bible. Take some time to listen to the voice of the Shepherd. Put yourself in the place of one of those sheep in the flock.

How do the words of the Psalm and Jesus’ words from John speak to you?

You might find this extract from the prayer of St Patrick’s Breastplate helpful:

***Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me.
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.***