

Sermon preached by Rev. David Pettett at the Healing Service at St. Andrew's Cathedral, Sydney on Wednesday 12 October 2005. Reading: Psalm 23

Topic: "The Lord is My Shepherd"

When I was a hospital chaplain I spent a lot of my time encouraging people to put their trust in the Lord. Whatever was going on, whatever the outcome, know the Lord Jesus and trust him for good. I often saw patients who had been in the medical system for a long time who had vague symptoms that the doctors found hard to get to the bottom of. I encouraged these patients and others to come to the Healing Service. Some of them actually started coming. So I thought I'd better get along too! That's why I started coming two or three years ago. I began to understand the power of God as people coming here found that they were not alone. Finally they saw others in total dependence on God. People with the same struggles, who were bringing those struggles before the Lord and trusting him for healing. There is encouragement in being with God's people, seeing others with similar issues bringing those before God in a spirit of dependence, seeing some of those people healed.

Psalm 23 is a very personal Psalm. "The LORD is **my** shepherd." It's a favourite Psalm of many and it is often used as a Psalm of great comfort in times of trouble.

This LORD who is **my** shepherd is not mine alone. This is not a god of my own imagining. This is not some sentimental thought or wishful thinking. This God has acted in history for his people and I can therefore be assured that he is able to act for me.

This LORD is the Shepherd of Israel. He is the one by whom Jacob blesses his sons in Genesis 49 (Gen. 49:24). Many of the Psalms speak of the shepherd in a communal sense. Pss 80:1, 77:20, and the well known Ps 95:6-7 "Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker! For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand."

This LORD is the shepherd of his people, his nation. I am part of something much bigger than myself. But this LORD is also **my** shepherd. I am not just one of the crowd. He is mine. He knows me.

Have you ever met the Queen? You would have a sense of occasion, feel part of something big. You get your moment to say, "Hello". You pass some small talk and the Queen moves on. You get to dine out on your experience for some time but ultimately the whole thing seems something of an anticlimax, I imagine. There's so much more that you wanted to say, but there was no time.

This is not so with the LORD. Yes, he is the shepherd of all Israel – in fact he's the Creator of the entire universe – but he is also **my** shepherd. I can sit and talk with him as long as I like. I can share with him my greatest joys and my worst fears and **my** shepherd has time to sit and listen with me. Here we are. We're gathered in this place with God's people. This shepherd who is **my** shepherd is also your shepherd, our shepherd. I am, we are, at one and the same time, part of this community of the LORD and intimately and personally known by him. I therefore want for nothing!

The LORD is my shepherd, I have all that I need. Whether I have good health or bad, I have the LORD. There is nothing else that I need. This must be our starting point. The LORD provides all that I need, in sickness or in health. He makes me lie down in green pastures. When things go the way I don't want them to go, I tend to get anxious. The LORD doesn't just provide green pastures for me to rest in he **makes** me lie down! He leads me beside still waters. In the midst of my turmoil my shepherd leads me to still waters. When I can't see which way to turn the LORD says, "Over here. You need some calm. Sit down and enjoy the tranquillity." When the going is tough the LORD protects me by providing a tranquil place, a sanctuary in Him where I can rest and be protected from the turmoils of life. Because he protects me and leads me into places of calm, he restores me. I can face the turmoils of life. I can face the threats of my illness and so my shepherd leads me in paths of righteousness. With a clear perspective on life I face my fears with confidence because I face them with my shepherd who is not only leading me but leading all those of faith around me. Leading all those of his own people who have gone before me. The LORD leads me for his own name's sake. He has been the faithful God of Israel. He will continue to lead me in righteousness

because he is still that same faithful God. In practical terms this means that even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. When I face even the greatest fear I could imagine, strangely, I will not be afraid because I know the LORD's protection. I know his presence with me. I know that with his very own rod for beating off the enemy and his very own staff for pulling a wandering sheep back into line, he will protect me. And knowing that protection I will know the comfort that the Father of mercies and God of all comfort comforts me with. (See 2 Corinthians 1:3-4) Yes, God protects me from what I fear.

But God doesn't stop there. He provides a banquet for me. He is not just concerned about my protection. He's there to add blessing upon blessing. He prepares a banquet table for me. He gives me life abundant.

But God doesn't stop there. He sets up this banquet in the face of my enemies. That enemy I feared is now subdued as I feast at the banqueting table of the LORD. That enemy that I was afraid would overtake me, now sits and watches, subdued, as I feast abundantly at the LORD's table.

But God doesn't stop there. He anoints my head with oil. In other words, he cleans me up for the banquet. He doesn't just grab me out of the valley of the shadow of death and set me at table, dusty, tired, deshevelled. He grooms me so that I will sit at this table and feel as if I belong, so that I will feel refreshed and enjoy the repast.

But God doesn't stop there. He fills my cup to overflowing. This banquet is abundant. It has all I need and then more. This banquet is my life that the LORD, **my** shepherd, has given me in abundance to overflowing.

Jeremy was a young man dying of cancer. He was afraid and as a consequence he was short tempered with his family and the hospital staff. At the point he came finally to understand the love of God in Christ tears began rolling down his face. He said, "I feel so much at peace." He had understood the comfort of God. His relationships with his family improved. The staff commented on how pleasant he now was to deal with. He was so enraptured with the sunrise one morning he proclaimed, "I am so blessed people will be lining up to trade places with me". He died the following morning, not healed in body but restored in soul.

The psalmist, enraptured with the fullness of life the shepherd has given him, proclaims finally in v.6 that goodness and mercy will follow him all the days of his life. What ever he does, wherever he goes he will never be able to escape the covenant blessings of God's goodness and mercy. They will be his constant shadow. God's goodness and mercy will out-shadow the shadow in the valley of death. The psalmist has been looking back at the faithfulness of a covenant God. He is very much personalising the LORD's protection and provision as he looks to the future without fear. Right at the end of the Psalm he moves indoors from the green pastures and quiet waters where he declares with absolute certainty, "I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever." He is talking about the Temple. He is saying that in his covenant relationship with his shepherd he will live in the presence of the LORD all his days. Living in the presence of the LORD means there will be no want and no fear. Jesus said he came into the world so that the sheep may have life and have it abundantly. He said that he is the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. John 10:10-11. What the psalmist wrote 1,000 years before Christ finds its fulfilment in Christ. Do you want to know the provision and protection of the Good Shepherd? Do you want to know your soul restored? Say, "Yes" to Jesus and keep on saying, "Yes" to him.