

## Psalm 23

### “He Leads Me Beside Still Waters”

In the year following the destruction on 9/11 over half a million New Yorkers were diagnosed with chronic depression. I was among them, and I began seeing a therapist in Manhattan whose office was a few blocks from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. After our weekly sessions I would stroll down the eastern edge of Central Park, and duck into the museum for an hour or two. Usually, my first stop would be the Asian wing where there were two pieces of sculpture that had a powerful effect on me. The first was a life size Japanese statue of the Buddha seated on a lotus flower that just exuded a sense of peace. The second was a piece by Isamu Noguchi called 'Water Stone'. It was a bed of rounded granite stones with a two-foot-tall block of basalt in the middle, which served as a fountain. However, as water slid down the walls of the block, on top it looked like a sheet of glass. Not a single ripple in the water. I would sit for periods of time just gazing at that water feeling almost envious of the peaceful, calm vibe it gave off, and sometimes I could even feel that peacefulness within myself.

Meditating on that 'Water Stone', I began to more deeply appreciate the words, “he leads me beside still waters”. I also began to see the words “still water” as a metaphor for the state of our souls, a state of spiritual equilibrium related to the words “he restores my soul”.

Looking back, I've come to recognize that in times of stress and anxiety I have had a habit of gravitating towards water – whether a stream, or river, or lake, or the ocean. The ocean especially where the crashing of the surf on the beach and the waters subsequent retreat back into the sea seems analogous to the rhythms of life with its own ebbs and flow. Times of crisis, times of peace. Times of despair, times of hope. Times of doubt, times of faith.

At a time, such as this with so much anxiety concerning the coronavirus it's not such a bad idea for each of us to find that which symbolizes 'still waters', particularly as it translates into 'still waters' in ourselves. And that may be different for each of us, but the place for us to start is to focus on the word 'he', as in, “he leads me beside still waters” (Or 'she' if you prefer.) It is he/she that leads us to green pastures, beside still waters, and leads us in right paths. And especially at a time such as this when we find ourselves walking through a dark valley, it is particularly comforting to know that he/she is with us.

I know this is not always easy, returning to the issue of the “hiddenness of God”, but God's presence in our lives is discernible through one particular faculty, i.e., the eyes of faith. The things that brings those eyes to life are belief and trust. Especially trust. It has been pointed out that the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm is an eloquent expression of trust in the one we recognize as shepherd.

The role of shepherd, in its original usage, was to guide, to lead, and to protect, and in ancient times the term was often applied to those in positions of leadership, especially royalty. In this psalm it is obviously applied to God, and in the context of the church it is most often applied to the one we refer to as the Good Shepherd – Jesus Christ. Just as a shepherd leads his flock to green pastures and still waters to be fed and refreshed, so we look to Jesus to lead us to Living Waters and those things that feed our souls.

The last words in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm are “and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long”. Unfortunately, for the time being we cannot “dwell in the house of the Lord”, but that is only if we think of the house of the Lord strictly as a building on W. University Ave. For me the house of the Lord is something we carry with us throughout the week in our hearts and minds. The artist, Salvador Dali, once wrote, 'The Kingdom of God is found in the center of the heart of a person with faith.' The church is not the kingdom of God – it is that which bears witness to the kingdom – but I think we can safely say that the person with faith, as well as the person whose heart is filled with love for their sisters and brothers in Christ, carries the house of the Lord in their heart as well. Amen.

Let us pray...

Lord, these are trying times that we are facing, but we take comfort in the fact that you are with us and that you lead us to places of peace and restoration for our souls. Be with us in the days and weeks ahead blessing us with the patience and perseverance needed to meet the challenges ahead.

We lift up to you those who have died as a result of this virus and give thanks that you have welcomed them into your loving arms. We also pray that you lead those they leave behind to places of still waters in their hearts and souls. Help us all to look to the future with hope and an undying faith. Amen