

23rd June 2021

Valleys

**“Every valley shall be exalted,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low.”**

Bible, Isaiah 40

When I worked in the hospice and there was an opportunity to read scripture with people, I always turned to the Book of Psalms. For in the one hundred and fifty Psalms recorded in our bibles, there is the whole panoply of life, from rejoicing to devastation, faith to doubt, affirmation to complaint. “The Lord is my Shepherd” was always a favourite. We’re told St Augustine of Hippo in the 5th century chose this twenty-third Psalm as “The Hymn of the Martyrs”. Is it any wonder that so many people in so many circumstances have been strengthened by its words through the centuries, including in the face of suffering and death?

“The Psalms of David” are, of course, rooted in Judaism, but they have been embraced by all Christian traditions too. And there can be no doubt that “The Lord is my Shepherd” remains a universal favourite. Sung to melodies such as *Crimond, Brother James’s Air, Orlington* or *Wiltshire*, you’d be hard pressed to find a good Presbyterian who doesn’t know the metrical version of Psalm 23 off by heart.

I found a version of the 23rd Psalm published in Amsterdam in 1629 and written by Alexander Top Esquier. The middle verse is this:

*Yea when I goe in the dim & dusky valley,
I feare no ill, because thou art with me,
and thy very rodd & thy leaning staff they comfort me.*

I take two things from that. The first: the difficult valleys of life are not always totally dark – such as the Martyrs walked through to their death – but are more often just “dim & dusky”. The blessings of God offer comfort not just *in extremis*, but in every dim or dusky time. The second: the “leaning staff” isn’t a shepherd’s crook that drags us back from danger, but a staff we can lean on when we are weary on the journey.

Thank God today for the Good Shepherd’s constant presence in valleys of every kind, with the staff of His love to lean on we need it most.

A prayer for today

*“I am the Good Shepherd” you tell me.
And, as one of your flock, I give thanks and praise to God. Amen.*

An original reflection by @ Tom Gordon Also available at <https://swallowsnestnet.wordpress.com>