

20th May 2022

Forever

**“God's great goodness aye endureth,
deep his wisdom, passing thought:
splendour, light, and life attend him,
beauty springeth out of naught.
Evermore from his store
new-born worlds rise and adore.”**

Joachim Neander, All my Hope on God is Founded

There's a story told of a Sunday School class being introduced to the words and meaning of the 23rd Psalm, and in particular the concept of Jesus as the loving Shepherd of His flock. During the lesson, one child was particularly animated, constantly trying to interrupt. Eventually the teacher succumbed, and, turning to the child said, "Yes? What is it you want to add?" "Please Miss," the girl replied excitedly, "If Jesus was a shepherd, he must have had sheep dogs." Surprised at this unexpected addition to the concept, the teacher wisely responded, "Well, thank you. That's very helpful." But the youngster wasn't finished. "Please Miss," she continued, "and he had *two* dogs, *and* I know their names?" The teacher had no choice but to say, "And ... how did you figure that out?" "Easy Miss. The dogs are called *Goodness* and *Mercy*, because it says, 'Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life', and that's just what the sheepdogs do on my uncle John's farm."

This final reflection on The Lord's Prayer needs little added to it than that. A child had identified the faithfulness, constancy, availability of the goodness and mercy of God in a metaphor from her own life experience. This, therefore, is the culmination of the prayer Jesus taught us: "For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever". Forever and ever – the assuredness, the faithfulness, the "Alpha and Omega" of the love and presence of God. Whatever goes before it, however we interpret it or live it out, this is the phrase in The Lord's Prayer we can hold on to.

"God's great goodness aye endureth" was the way Joachim Neander put it. "The faithful dogs of goodness and mercy" was how a little girl saw it. Either way, the faithfulness of God, is promised forever and ever.

A prayer for today

Goodness! I have God's goodness following me. Mercy! That's amazing.

An original reflection by © Tom Gordon

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