



## Carstairs-Bancroft United Church

October 5, 2021

### DAILY ENCOURAGEMENT DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC By Rev. Maria Szabone Berces



Source: Our Daily Bread

Beloved Carstairs Bancroft United Church Members,

#### Today's Inspiration in one sentence

**"I will fear no evil, for you are with me"**

(Psalm 23:4)

#### Did You Know?

- **Psalm 23** is part of Book I: Ps 1-41. The title tells us that it was written by David. It is a profession of joyful trust in the Lord as the good Shepherd-King. This psalter may have accompanied a festival of praise at "the house of the Lord" (v. 6) following a deliverance. The basic theme of the psalm is announced in the very first verse: **"The Lord is my shepherd"**

- Shepherd is a widely used metaphor for kings in the ancient ear East, and also in Israel. So, when describing the authority and care exercised by a deity or a king who represents the gods, the image of a shepherd was natural. Hammurapi (c. 1750 BC) wrote that he received kingship from the gods, and he fulfilled his royal duty as a shepherd by providing the people with *"pastures and watering places"*. Ashurbanipal (c. 650 BC) reports that he was appointed as shepherd to overthrow enemies. Thus, the metaphor of shepherd was a royal one, with connotations of strong leadership but tender care.

- In Psalm 23, David the king acknowledges that the Lord is his Shepherd-King. As a shepherd leads his sheep in paths that offer safety and well-being, so David's Shepherd-King guides him in ways that cause him to be secure and prosperous.

(The NIV Study Bible; Psalms)

#### Personal Insight

As we read and try to understand the ancient texts of the Scripture, it is interesting to know the social and cultural background of the era in which it was written. Even those of us who may have learned anything about a shepherd's job in our time wouldn't know about royal connotations of this role way back from 1440 BC to after 538 BC, when the Book of Psalms was put into its final form.

I have to admit I don't know too much about shepherding beyond the explanations I read on related Bible passages. But I had a chance to watch a funny and informative Amazon series titled *"Clarkson's Farm"*. He is a British celebrity, who decided to run his farm, and also to buy sheep so he didn't need to mow the lawn. He didn't know what he was undertaking! But after a lot of challenges and finally employing a professional shepherd, even he grew connected to these - not very bright - creatures.

We were created with a good brain and understanding, **"in the image of God"** (Genesis 1:27). Nevertheless, just as King David did, it is still wise to lean on the guidance and leadership of our "Shepherd-King" to be secure and prosperous.

Grace and Peace to You All,

Rev. Maria



## With Us in the Valley

*I will fear no evil, for you are with me.*

Psalm 23:4

### READ Psalm 23

As Hannah Wilberforce (aunt of British abolitionist William Wilberforce) lay dying, she wrote a letter in which she mentioned hearing about the death of a fellow believer in Jesus: “Happy is the dear man who is gone to glory, now in the presence of Jesus, whom unseen he loved. My heart seemed to jump for joy.” Then she described her own situation: “Myself, better and worse; Jesus, as good as ever.”

Her words make me think of Psalm 23, where David writes, “Even though I walk through the darkest valley [the valley of the shadow of death], I will fear no evil, for you are with me” (v. 4). Those words leap from the page because it’s there, in the middle of the valley of the shadow of death, where David’s description of God turns deeply personal. He moves from talking *about* God in the beginning of the psalm— “the Lord is my shepherd” (v. 1)—to talking *to* Him: “for *you are with me*” (v. 4, italics added).

How reassuring it is to know that almighty God who “brought forth the whole world” (90:2) is so compassionate that He walks with us through even the most difficult places. Whether our situation turns better or worse, we can turn to our Shepherd, Savior, and Friend and find Him “as good as ever.” So good that death itself is vanquished, and we will “dwell in the house of the Lord forever” (23:6). – By **James Banks**

### REFLECT & PRAY

**My Shepherd, thank You for Your perfect faithfulness and kindness to me. Help me to stay near You today. Amen.**

How does it comfort you to know that Jesus our Shepherd is always with you? How can you share that hope with someone today?

### SCRIPTURE INSIGHT

In the Old Testament, we’re accustomed to the writers using metaphors to describe God, and in most cases those metaphors are of inanimate objects. One such cluster of metaphors is found in Psalm 18:2: “The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.” In that verse alone, no less than five different inanimate metaphors are used—rock, fortress, shield, horn, stronghold. This is part of what sets Psalm 23 apart. It’s one of the most prominent passages in the Old Testament where a personal metaphor is used to describe God—the shepherd. In a culture rooted in agriculture (including shepherding), the nature of the relationship between a sheep and its shepherd would be well known, making this word picture a fitting way to understand how deeply our God cares for us. – By **Bill Crowder**

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