

Thought for the Day

Thought for the day is based on one of the day's lectionary readings.

For the Bible online, go to: <http://bible.oremus.org/>

Choose your version (we use NRSV in church)

Copy and paste the reference into the search box and the passage will be displayed.

Saturday 4 April

Psalm 23

Each day in the lectionary there are readings set for 3 services, so that gives quite a choice of text for this reflection. I try to vary the passages used. But I often find that one of the psalms seems to speak into our situation and its not surprising as the book of psalms is a collection of prayers covering every kind of human experience and emotion. It's a great prayer resource. One psalm I am pretty sure everyone will recognise is this one – Psalm 23, the Lord is my shepherd. You may know the lovely hymn versions of the words. It's often read or sung at a funeral. The image of God as our shepherd and us as his sheep, cared for in green pastures is so comforting. But life is not always lived in green pastures and alongside still waters where all is tranquillity and peace. It also takes us to the valley of the shadow of death. Even there, the psalmist rejoices, 'I will fear no evil' Why not? 'For you are with me.'

Tomorrow is Palm Sunday, when we remember Jesus riding on a donkey as he entered Jerusalem, with other pilgrims waving palms and laying a carpet of them, cheering him, with hosannas. It looked to them like a happy day, unclouded rejoicing. But to Jesus who had a shrewd idea of what was to come, it was a walk, a procession, into the valley of the shadow of death. Hostility and danger were building up around him and the outcome was more and more certain. Still he went on, drawing courage from the strength of God within him. The ordeal had to be gone through; there was no chance of fast-forwarding to Easter day. How we would love to fast-forward to the end of our pandemic. But we can't. We have to go through it, step by step, knowing that it is building up and getting worse day by day. Many people are quite literally passing through the valley of the shadow, some to come through into the light of the sun again, others passing over into that other light. How can we do this? Where can we find the strength?

One way is to pray this psalm, keep praying it every day. Stop and reflect on each phrase. There are depths to be found. The Lord *is* our shepherd; therefore can we lack nothing; we will fear no evil, for the Lord is with us.

*Keep us, good Lord, under the shadow of your mercy in this time of uncertainty and distress.
Sustain and support the anxious and fearful, and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may rejoice in your comfort,
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.*