

Faith during this pandemic

Just turn to Psalm 23 when you are unsure, frightened and alone, says Shirley Murphy

Psalm 23 is undoubtedly one of the best-known passages in the Bible. Most of us learned it as children and it continues to be a comfort to those who are dying and for those who have lost loved ones. Maybe it's so well-loved because it is so personal and individual.

It is exactly what we need to hear today in the midst of Covid-19. The lightning fast and unpredictable spread of the coronavirus has created fear around the world and people are unsure what to do. When we look at all the changes taking place in our own lives and in the world, we acknowledge the uncertainties of our future. Every day we hear the statistics of cases and deaths which makes us wonder how long it will be before we again greet each other with hugs, kisses, and handshakes. Many of us don't want more information or answers about Covid-19 and we certainly don't want more instructions on what to do or not do.

But in these distressing times, one good thing that has come out of this dreadful pandemic is that many people who had no faith, lost their faith or were waylaid have turned towards God. I hear from some of my own friends, who never went to church or had faith, that they are now posting Bible verses and prayers on social media and talking about the love of God in their own lives. Some have contacted me to let me know that they have dusted their cupboards and raided their houses from top to bottom to find their Bibles and have started reading them, many reading the Psalms and Proverbs every day. But it is wonderful to listen to people tell me that it is Psalm 23 which gives them the much needed comfort, peace and, above all, the protection they seek in these difficult times.

Of all the psalms it's probably the best known and many people's favourite. Its words are familiar and beloved. I suspect most of us know the words, and some of us have even memorised them. They have always comforted us in times of uncertainty, sustained us through sorrow and loss, given us courage when we are afraid and assured us there is nothing to fear in the dark valley of death. This psalm offers hope and strength to take our next step and reminds us that there is always a way forward even when we feel powerless and fearful and assures us of the promise that we never walk alone.

Psalm 23 has always been a great comfort. I have heard and seen people who have lost their memories, from dementia or Alzheimer's, reciting it verbatim.

We need this psalm at the moment more than ever. It can nourish us and give us peace while we are stunned at the turn of events around the world and afraid for our own well-being and that of our loved ones during this pandemic. However, in Psalm 23 we get the reminder we need. "*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.*" In our fear and in our confusion, God is with us. We are never alone.

Like sheep, we also are easily frightened. We live in uncertain times. Any hour can bring disaster. And generally, it is the unknown, the unexpected, that frightens us most. But nothing quiets our souls like knowing that our Shepherd is near. Suddenly things are not half as bleak nor nearly as terrifying. Our Lord is with us. "God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." (1 Timothy 1:7).

As we stay in our homes, perhaps gripped by fear, we should always trust and know that Jesus Christ, who is the Good Shepherd, will pick us up and carry us in our moments of greatest need.

Stay safe and God bless you all 😊