

12th October, 2014.

Reading: Psalm 23

Sermon: The Lord is my Shepherd. I lack nothing.

The young student killed on a beach in Thailand with her boyfriend was brought home recently by her parents and on Friday they held her funeral service.

As is the case with that family, the family of the young girl found in the canal down south now have to come to terms with living life without her.

Both families have to deal with the horror of what their children went through and have to learn to live with the fact that they were not there and could do nothing to help them.

The Lord is my Shepherd. I lack nothing.

The family of man, who was the main suspect in the murder of the young girl down south was also found dead, and his family have to deal with his loss, with the public's perception of him and with the publicity surrounding him.

The Lord is my Shepherd. I lack nothing.

A daughter has lost both her parents within a nine week period. While still trying to come to terms with the first death, she has been struck with the second death. Her children have lost both grandparents in a matter of weeks.

The Lord is my Shepherd. I lack nothing.

The people of Sierra Leone and other African countries have lost four thousand people to Ebola and live in fear of it striking them or any more of their loved ones. The rest of the world is on edge, not knowing where it will strike next if people continue to travel and that despite the checks which are now being made. Hospitals in Britain did a practice yesterday of what they would have to do if someone who had just returned from Africa presented with symptoms. The world is on high alert.

The Lord is my Shepherd. I lack nothing.

Individuals leave home in the morning and fail to return home at night due to accidents on the road.

Families fall out and youngsters head for the bright lights of London never to be seen again. Youngsters are left alone, afraid and homeless and families are left wondering where they are and if they are safe.

The Lord is my Shepherd. I lack nothing.

Young adults get caught up in crime and in addiction and those around them feel helpless. They watch and wait but can do little or nothing to help those they love.

The Lord is my Shepherd. I lack nothing.

Many face crippling illnesses, physical and mental illnesses. Many live with disabilities. Many face failing health and situations which are life limiting although not always life shortening. Some see only a black hole ahead of them and despair of the future.

The Lord is my Shepherd. I lack nothing.

Many have lost their jobs and their homes. Many have lost all they possess as a result of fires and natural disasters. Many are starving. Many are being bombarded by missiles day and night. Many face an uncertain future. In a way, maybe we all do.

The Lord is my Shepherd. I lack nothing.

I could go on but I suspect that we all have the picture. Life can be horrendous. Many people have walked a path through life which has challenged them and which at times has almost brought them to their knees. Many of us have been on similar paths and have felt the same challenges and the same crippling emotions. In those moments have we been able to repeat the words of the Psalmist with conviction and with faith?

The Lord is my Shepherd. I lack nothing.

It's a tremendous statement of faith to be able to utter when our world is crumbling around us but how easy is it? Rev. Andrew Donald, Minister of Kirkcaldy: Pathhead wrote on the Church of Scotland website: The demonstration of the Lord's goodness and mercy is not shown in the absence of pain, difficulty, doubt, disappointment, conflict and strife, but rather through all these things. God's goodness and mercy is shown in times of hardship.

Are we aware of God's goodness and mercy in our darkest moments? Are we conscious of our Shepherd guiding us to still waters where we can renew our strength even in the midst of the most awful turmoil? Are we willing at those times to follow or are we, momentarily, like the sheep in One Man and His Dog who makes a run for it while the others are being guided to the safety of the pen? Andrew Donald says this Psalm rings true in the experience of us all as we journey through life, but does it?

That God is with us in the darkest of times is true. What the Psalmist

says is right. Our shepherd does lead us to still waters, even in the midst of turmoil. He leads us to a place where we can find peace, His peace, and aware of it, we can find our souls refreshed, strengthened, more able to cope with all that life is throwing at us but can we say that we lack nothing, that all our needs are met? Can we say that we are always aware of God's presence in the darker moments when despair takes over.

I ask the question because often we are so disgruntled with life that all we do is moan about our lot in life, although we often add that there are a lot of people worse off. That is small comfort when we are dealing with our own traumas and actually irrelevant. What other people are going through doesn't actually make us feel any better.

The Lord is my Shepherd. I lack nothing. The Psalmist demonstrates his faith but I always feel it would be great to know more about the life of the Psalmist at the time of writing. What was going on in his life? David, we know had been hounded by Saul and by his own son, Absalom, but at this point we don't know what is going on in his life. He certainly would be at risk out in the wilds. He may have realised that he had some dark valleys still to walk through where anything could happen. He would certainly have been in a frightening environment and by the sounds of it, life was pretty hard. **You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.**

That sounds almost reckless. When we read it we couldn't be blamed for thinking that a different venue might have been better. However, it's not as bad as it seems.

As spring approached, the Shepherd would start looking for pasture for his sheep for the summer months. He would climb up to high plateaux and he would examine every inch of the pastureland to ensure that there were no poisonous plants which would kill his lambs if they ate them. He would decide if certain which areas were suitable only for light grazing and which had ample grass for his sheep. He would ensure everything was ready for them. He would prepare the way for them but then isn't that what Jesus does. He goes ahead of us to lead us along the right paths and to lead us towards his kingdom.

There would still be dangers just as there are dangers which we face but the shepherd in our Psalm can rest content because He knows the one who has prepared the way for him. He knows the one who has prepared the table in the presence of his enemies and so feels secure despite the potential threats.

The Lord is my Shepherd. I lack nothing.

It's not that he has great wealth, or a great number of possessions. but he was under God's care and that was all that mattered to him. Do we know that? From that place of safety, he knew that he was secure. Are we aware of that feeling of security? He knew that God would be with him no matter what happened on his journey through life. Do we have that confidence in our God? He knew that in God He would find peace in times of trouble and turmoil. Do we? He knew that He would find comfort in the presence of God. Do we? He knew that He was secure for all eternity. Are we? **I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.**

This Psalm began on a positive note with the Psalmist stating: **The Lord is my Shepherd.** It ends on an equally positive note: **I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.**

The Psalmist feels so secure, so safe, so content, so much at home with the Shepherd, that there is absolutely nothing he would change.

The Psalm covers a whole year in the life of the sheep. They began on green pastures. They travelled to the high plateaux and then with the weather breaking, they head back home, back to the green pastures for the winter.

The Psalmist may not always be happy. Life may not always be easy but he is content because He has faith in his Shepherd. There is a bond between Him and His Lord which nothing can break. It's a bond which assure him that he will be forever in the presence of his Shepherd, in the presence of His Lord and just as importantly, in full view of Him. It's that conviction that allows the Psalmist to say with certainty: **The Lord is my Shepherd. I lack nothing.** What more does he need that the constant caring presence of His God. What more do we need?