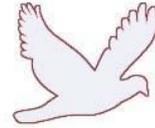




Borders Mission Circuit

Part of the Methodist Church of Great Britain



The **Methodist** Church 

Ministers Message for Sunday 25th April, 2021. **Bible readings: Psalm 23 & John 10:11-18.**

Good Shepherd-ing?- Be a kindly shepherd behind me.

Dear friends in BMC,

'*The Lord is my Shepherd*' and Jesus saying about himself '*I am The Good Shepherd*' are pieces from Scripture we are familiar with. The danger is that we can be so familiar with them we struggle to see them in a different perspective, perhaps?

A prayer of St. Columbia says: "***Be a bright flame before me, a guiding star above me. Be a smooth path below me, a kindly shepherd behind me, today, tonight and for ever.***" Some of us might feel it is not a nice experience having someone behind us. Whether that is on the A38 or M1 in a car, or someone behind us in a supermarket who perhaps does not make themselves or their needs known! In these times of *hands, face and Space*, the experience may feel more uncomfortable for us whilst in the Supermarket. St. Columbia refers to God as a kindly shepherd behind us. This imagery resonates with Psalm 23. Whilst the sheep feed and rest, the Shepherd watches over them. Seeing somewhere beautiful, eating properly and resting are all vital for us in life, especially if we are low or in a dark valley in our life. In Psalm 23 (and still in middle eastern farming) the shepherd is depicted as ahead of the sheep, but the kindly shepherd is behind us. Behind us lies all that is past, and the kindly shepherd turns us around from time to time to look at the past. There is often much to let go of and be released from our personal story (and I suggest, sometimes in church life) With a kindly shepherd, we might be able to look at our younger or foolish selves through his eyes of love, that allows us to take the path to freedom. Justine Allain-Chapman (in her book '*The Resilient Disciple*') says: "*The shepherd looks on our past with love, forgiveness and healing, and as he turns us around he holds us to enable us to look and remember knowing all that he, as the Good Shepherd, has accomplished.*"

When people are behind us we can find we have to wait for them because we've forged ahead (Subtle hint to my wife and colleague, Sam who always walks too fast!) We can keep looking back just in case they have disappeared. The ability to wait on God is a sign of maturing faith.

Think of the church calendar. When we add up the 4 weeks of Advent, 6 weeks of Lent and the 10 days between Ascension and Pentecost when the disciples waited for the gift of the Holy Spirit, we find that the invitation to wait takes up almost a quarter of the Churches year.

Perhaps we-as individuals and Churches- need to develop a sense of the Kindly Shepherd behind us, one who watches our back, holds our past, and yet prompts us forward in such a way that we know we will be provided for all that awaits?

God Bless you. Rev. Pete, on behalf of Rev. Robert, Rev. Ann, Rev. Nicola & Deacon Sam.

For reflection this week, I encourage you to read-below- Malcolm Guite's poetic interpretation of Psalm 23 (from his book *'David's Crown-Sounding the Psalms'*)

To suffer my own dereliction for me,

To be my shepherd, and to lead me through

The grave and gate of death, in strength and mercy

Christ has come down. At last I've found the true Shepherd

The false just fade away

Before him. I will sing of how he drew

Me from the snares I set myself, how day

Dawned on my darkness, how he brough me forth,

Converted me and opened up the way

For me, and led me gently on that path,

Led me beside still waters, promised me

That he'd be with me all my days on earth,

And when my last day comes, accompany

And comfort me, as evening shadows fall,

And draw me into his eternity.