

## GOING THROUGH THE DARKNESS

*“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.”*

The 23rd psalm is a beautiful passage to keep close to our hearts during times like these. I especially love the beauty and poetry of the King James Version that I memorized as a child during Sunday School. It is a passage that is often read during funerals because of its power to bring peace and consolation to troubled hearts. But it is not just for funerals, it is a psalm to be read in the midst of all kinds of adversity. I have always been captured by the fourth verse where the psalmist expresses his confidence that the Lord is with him, even as he walks **through the valley of the shadow of death.**

I think that the valley of the shadow of death is an apt description of our current moment as the whole world stands in the face of a deadly pandemic that has already taken the lives of thousands of people around the world, and threatens to take the lives of many more. And of course, it is the most vulnerable people in the world who have the most to fear - the elderly, the sick, the destitute, those whose immune systems have already been comprised by chronic illness.

Most of us have never lived through this kind of pandemic before and are therefore unacquainted with the hardships it imposes. In the aftermath of the twin tower attacks of 9/11 we were all encouraged to get out, go shopping, and quickly return to some semblance of normalcy. But these are the very things we are forbidden to do in the face of the COVID-19 epidemic. Instead we are told to hunker down, distance ourselves from each other, and shutter most of our normal routines as we wait out the siege from an invisible enemy.

I find it interesting that this pandemic happens to coincide with the season of Lent when we are asked to follow our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as he makes his way to the Cross. During the season of Lent, we

are asked to think about what it means to trust God in a world filled with fear, want, sickness, uncertainty, and death. Every year I try to give something up for the season of Lent. It is my way of trying to cultivate a deeper relationship of trust in God. But this year, Lent is not just a season on the Christian calendar that I may or may not observe. This year Lent has become real in a way that few of us could have imagined just two weeks ago. That's why I find the words of the psalmist so powerful this time around:

**Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.**

I think that the word that we should all keep in mind is the word "through." We don't make our home in the dark valley, but we walk through it. With God's help, we will all find our way through this current moment. We will find our way through it because, as the psalmist asserts, we are not alone. The God of love, mercy, and compassion is with us every step of the way, leading us, guiding us, comforting us. And not only is God with us, but we are with each other. So, if you are feeling alone, isolated and afraid, please understand that there is no degree of social distancing that can separate us from the bonds of Christ which has knitted us all together in God's love.

We don't know what the immediate future holds. What we do know is that there is life on other side of this dark valley, resurrection life. And because we know that, we can live through the current moment trusting that God has all of our lives, and indeed the whole world, in God's hands.

Randy