

Trinity 18 11th October 2020

11 th October Trinity 18	9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton 11.00 Holy Communion Halling	Isaiah 25 vv 1-9 p708 Philippians 4 vv 1-9 p1180 Matthew 22 vv 1-14 p990
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LORD, we beseech thee, grant thy people grace to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and with pure hearts and minds to follow thee the only God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

The psalm appointed for today is the best known of all the psalms. Very often, we say it or sing a version of it at a funeral. Sometimes, we have it at a wedding. It comes around at prayerbook Evensong on the 4th day of every month. It is a psalm which we sometimes use when people are dying or when they have just died. It is of course Psalm 23.

***THE** Lord is my shepherd : therefore can I lack nothing.*

That's a thought, isn't it? God Himself is taking care of us. Whatever happens to us, God is looking after us. Whatever we need, He will supply. We talk to God in prayer about everything which is on our minds. He is always with us. We can pray anywhere and everywhere and He always hears us and always answers our prayers – not necessarily in accordance with our wills, but always in accordance with His Will. In fact, one of the effects of praying is to bring our imperfect wills into line with God's perfect Will for our lives.

2. He shall feed me in a green pasture : and lead me forth beside the waters of comfort.

What do you think of when you think of a beautiful landscape? If you went to an art gallery and were looking at the pictures on the wall, what kind of landscape would you describe as beautiful? Mountain ranges, vast deserts and immense oceans may be awe-inspiring. Representations of country gardens and cottages might be pretty. Depictions of fine architecture can be grand and impressive. Paintings such as those by Hogarth of squalid slums, disfigured by poverty and hardship may move us to pity and teach us valuable lessons. But, surely, the landscapes most people call beautiful are pastoral or arable, fertile fields and meadows, an abundance of fresh clean water, productive copses and spinneys. There is a scientific explanation for this. The places we regard as beautiful are the places where it would be good to live, places where we should be comfortable and healthy and enjoy a sufficiency of wholesome food and drink. Green pastures and waters of comfort are an excellent metaphor for what it means to live in the love of God.

3. He shall convert my soul : and bring me forth in the paths of righteousness, for his Name's sake.

He shall convert my soul. The Hebrew means that God refreshes or restores our souls, our lives, that He brings us back, restores us to Himself, that we should turn away from sin and turn to God, that we should be converted. He quickens us by His Holy Spirit. He gives us life. We drink of Jesus, the Water of Life. Those who drink of Jesus never thirst again because Christ is all in all. *And bring me forth in the paths of righteousness, for his Name's sake.* To follow God, as we said last week, is to act justly and righteously. God leads us in the paths of righteousness and justice. He commands us to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and He enables us to do this by giving us His Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life. And

why does He lead us in the paths of righteousness? Because we are such good people? No, He cares for us and guides us and leads us for His Name's sake. God is love. His Name is love. He leads us in the paths of righteousness because He loves us.

4. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil : for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff comfort me. We dwell in the love of God, but that doesn't mean that we get all our own way, that we get everything that we want or that we never have to face hardship or sorrow. We walk in the footsteps of the crucified One. Many of the saints are also martyrs. St Paul wrote those wonderful words which we heard in today's epistle, but Paul endured a great deal in his life and was eventually beheaded under the Emperor Nero, but Christ never forsook him. He never forsakes us. What He said to Paul, He says to us, *My grace is sufficient for you.* We walk sometimes through deep darkness, as some translations have this verse. Eventually, we all walk through the shadow of death. But we don't have to be afraid. God is with us in the darkness as well as in the light. Jesus shares everything that it is to be human, including temptation, suffering and death. He understands everything about us. He is always with us. We can take everything to Him in prayer in the knowledge that He hears us and that He cares for us. We can cast all our cares on Him because He cares for us.

5. Thou shalt prepare a table before me against them that trouble me : thou hast anointed my head with oil, and my cup shall be full.

The commentator I read on this psalm talks about the psalmist enjoying God. We enjoy God. We receive His blessings. He takes care of us. He makes wonderful promises to us. We eat at His table. We enjoy God and that is something that no enemy, no persecutor, no trial or tribulation can take away from us. We enjoy God. He leads us in the paths of righteousness for His own Name's sake.

6. But thy loving-kindness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life : and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

And finally, what we experience of God's love here on earth is but a foretaste and a pledge of what is to come in the life hereafter.

Romans 8: 31 What shall we then say to these things? If God *be* for us, who *can* *be* against us? **32** He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? **33** Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? *It is* God that justifieth. **34** Who is he that condemneth? *It is* Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. **35** Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? **36** As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. **37** Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. **38** For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, **39** Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.