

Saturday, January 28, 2017 - Day 27 – Exodus 19-21; Psalm 23; Matt 24

There are times when a choice is so obvious that one does well to avoid it and go in an unexpected direction. Then there are times in which the choice is so obvious that it requires one to make that obvious choice. Psalm 23 presents us, I think, with the second scenario.

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want..." It is hard to imagine the number of people for whom those comforting verses were the last words spoken. Greater still is the number of people who have uttered them in the belief that they might well be their last words. If I am completely honest, this psalm never quite grabbed me the way it does so many. I've always been struck by the fact that we continued to find such comfort in David's description of this idyllic and pastoral scene; even those of us who have spent nearly our entire lives in far more urban contexts. What is it about this scene that so grabs us. Is it simply its familiarity, or is there something more? What might be lurking there below the surface of those still waters?

In the midst of the pastuality, we find ourselves in verse five, "you prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies." My goodness, until now even the valley of the shadow of death didn't seem so bad, with the pastures and the still waters, and the Lord with rod and staff. And yet, *et in arcadia ego*. Our table is not prepared in the absence of enemies, but in the presence of them.

So often this psalm is a comfort to us in time of affliction or illness, but far more common to our human experience than dire infirmity is conflict. We find ourselves surrounded constantly by those with whom we have some issue, whether it be major or minor. What does it mean, then, for the Lord to prepare us a table in the midst of our enemies? What does it mean to rest in the Lord not only in the idyll, but in the strife? How can we feel and welcome God's loving and saving presence into these sometimes tense situations? Perhaps most importantly, for whom is this table before me prepared? Is it just for me, or is it for both me and my enemies? If it's not just for me, how might that change my perceptions of the world around me?

By The Rev. Daniel Stroud