



“Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff - they comfort me.” (Psalm 23:4)

My neighborhood is all decked out for Halloween. Not my house, mind you. I don't go in for all that stuff, but some people in our development REALLY do. While out walking the dog one evening last week Barb and I crossed paths with our neighbor from across the street with her little one in tow. She told us she was taking him to see the “Halloween House.” We knew the one. Her son was afraid of skeletons. We assured her that he would see plenty at the house she had referenced, and wished her good luck. As if we needed more scary stuff at a time when every morning brings something else to our attention.

I've taken a break from some non-fictional heavy reading and turned to a novel by William Kent Krueger, *This Tender Land*. Set in 1932, it tells the story of children in an orphanage in rural Minnesota, administered by a couple that really don't give two hoots for the kids that are left in their care. One passage describes a Sunday morning church service led by the couple:

“To begin his sermon that Sunday, Mr. Brickman read the 23rd Psalm, which was odd. Normally he drew his inspiration from some Old Testament passage that had a lot of smiting in it. After the psalm he talked about God as our shepherd, which led to him and Mrs. Brickman and how, like God, they thought of us as sheep that needed their tending and they did their best to take care of us, which led to our need to be grateful to God for the salvation of our souls and to the Brickmans for the salvation of our bodies, for giving us a roof over our heads and food in our bellies. The whole point of the sermon, in the end, was that we needed to show our gratitude to Mrs. Brickman and him by not being such pains in the a\$\$\$. I know that the selfish way he twisted that beautiful psalm was a load of crap, but I did want to believe that God was my shepherd and that somehow he was leading me through this dark valley of Lincoln School and I shouldn't be afraid.”

We want to believe that, too, don't we? But perhaps our desire to believe is tempered by the fact that there's a lot to be afraid of these days. I won't take the time or the space here to delineate those for you. We all know what they are. Some of them find their voices over and over again in the daily news; some are so personal and profound they are known only to us. Sharing them would only burden someone else, and voicing them would only make them all the more real.

My guess is that we have developed our own ways of confronting our fears. If we don't they are liable to devour us. One source of strength and encouragement is found in that most familiar of scripture passages, the 23rd Psalm. Maybe it's so familiar, that in our attempt to seek other more creative ways of dealing with our fears, we forget about it or glance over it. But we shouldn't. It reminds us that even in the darkest valleys God is present. Even when it seems there is no escape, God is there to comfort us.

As a reminder I share with you this video from contemporary Christian artist Brandon Heath:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sp2TKmfLnZ8>

May it cause you to remember that we have nothing to fear when we place our trust in God.

Pastor Chuck

Let us pray. O Lord, you are our shepherd. You restore our souls and lead us in paths of righteousness. Even when we walk through dark valleys we will fear no evil, for we know that you are present with us. You prepare a table before us in the presence of our enemies. Surely goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our lives, and we give thanks that we will come to live in your heavenly kingdom forever. Amen