

In the shadow of death

Bible reading: Psalm 23

The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me to lie down in green pastures:
He leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.
He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil: for you are with me;
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

Sad day yesterday. Found my robin at the bottom of the garden, dead. (I blame the neighbourhood cat. So much for neighbourly solidarity!) He was gorgeous — bold and cheeky like all robins, encouraging my new-found gardening instincts. He'd come and feed while we sat on the patio — he almost seemed to be waiting for me when I went out the evening before. Maybe he was too trusting. Maybe he was getting old (do robins get old?). But he was full of life — and now he's gone.

In the natural world, death is a fact of life, part of the cycle of death and rebirth. Dead leaves nourish the soil out of which new life springs. You know it's there — but it needn't diminish your joy in living: in fact, it can enhance it. Many people (like Dennis Potter) have found that the approach of death simply intensifies the joy of being alive, living each moment from day to day. Death makes us aware that life is a gift.

Watching the news, it's easy to feel we are in a whole new world. Death is coming much too quickly, to too many people across the world. It's all happening too fast for our minds to cope with. But people have lived with death and disease throughout human history (and without benefit of antibiotics). Epidemics were rife in the world of the Bible. And in the midst of it all, Psalm 23 tells us that God is still our Shepherd — not just in the green pastures and still waters, but in the dark and scary valleys as well. Even in isolation, even in the shadow of death, God is with us: holding us safe, bringing us through. As St Paul puts it, "Jesus died for us, so that whether we live or die, awake or asleep, we might live with him. Therefore encourage one another with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4.10-11). In life or in death, even a sparrow (or a robin!) is important to God: "Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. Fear not: you are of more value than many sparrows" (Luke 12.6-7).

Friends, we got through the first week! — by the grace of God, and with a lot of help from our friends. Give yourselves a pat on the back — and say a little prayer of thanks. Tomorrow is Sunday (don't forget the clocks go forward!!!) and Robin will be posting his sermon on the church website, <http://www.stphilipandstjames.co.uk>. Next week's *Thoughts for the Day* will be shared with Robin and with the Revd Rod Hill of Alderley Edge Methodist Church. Speak soon!
God bless, Loveday