

Column

One of the most comforting images of God found in the Bible is that of a shepherd. Perhaps the most familiar example is found in the 23rd Psalm, beginning with the words, “The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want.”

A less familiar but important example is found in Ezekiel 34. In this chapter, God, speaking through the prophet, says that the shepherds of Israel have been bad shepherds. They have taken care of themselves and not their sheep.

“Shepherds” here refers to those who have oversight of God’s covenant people, namely their kings. God’s message is that He Himself is coming to seek out His sheep and be their shepherd (king).

Both of these examples come from the Old Testament, but what about the New Testament? Does this language of sheep and shepherd carry over?

Yes, it does. In John’s Gospel, Jesus makes this language His own when He says: “I am the good shepherd.” In so saying, He makes the bold claim that He is that shepherd foretold in Ezekiel 34. In His person, Yahweh is becoming king. The true Shepherd of God’s people has arrived on Planet Earth.

But what about today? Does the God we meet in Jesus still exercise the care of a shepherd? I shall let the testimony of a man in Northern Ireland give answer to that question. In a video I saw this past week, this man told about being taken ill with the coronavirus and the hospital stay which ensued.

There, he found himself in a state of semi-consciousness, seesawing between life and death. As in our country during this time of pandemic, no family member or clergyman was allowed in to visit. He described feeling all alone and crying out to God for help . . . for the Almighty to send someone.

Not long after uttering this prayer, a room cleaner, who happened to be a Christian believer and a former missionary, opened the door of his room and inquired how he was doing. When he found the man was in distress, he offered to pray with him. After receiving his consent, the man, broom in hand, stood just outside the door and began asking God to restore this man’s failing lungs, to give him peace and to be his guardian and keeper.

After that, the sick man, now recovered, said he began to feel his strength returning. The words attributed to David in Psalm 23 -- “He restoreth my soul” – became real in his life that day.

Who can doubt that God still exercises the care of a shepherd and does so in the most extraordinary ways? In this case, by sending a room cleaner.

“The Lord is ‘my’ shepherd,” says the Psalmist. Is He yours? If not, don’t leave that promise on the table. Claim it today.

Saviour, like a shepherd lead us. / Much we need Thy tender care. / In Thy pleasant pastures feed us, / For our use thy folds prepare . . . Be the guardian of our way. Amen.

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