



# still waters

home church studies

## Psalm 23

[Worship]

1 The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.  
2 He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;  
3 he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.  
4 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.  
5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.  
6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.

### Consider:

[Words]

We live, from time to time, in “the valley of the shadow of death” (Psalm 23:4). That valley in many forms is marked by risk and threat. But in every such valley we are kept safe, because God has the capacity to guard, protect, and eventually make new. By the end of the psalm, the speaker is safe in God’s “goodness and mercy” (verse 6).

That transformative power of God—to make safe, to fill cups, to set tables (Psalm 23:4-5)—is evident in our two narratives. The prophet Samuel finds a new king for Israel, David, on whom God’s spirit rushes, an act that creates a new possibility for Israel. More spectacular is the healing of the blind boy in the gospel narrative. The boy bears witness to the power of God to overcome blindness and create new possibility.

Lent is a time to ponder the “valley” and to relish the goodness of God that makes all things new. As the valley in the psalm is also translated “darkest valley,” the epistle reading takes up the theme of “darkness” and witnesses to the light of the Lord in which the faithful may walk.

Paul’s teaching elsewhere details the “fruitful works of darkness” that disappoint God and damage the neighbor. Now the faithful are “children of the light,” who are to live differently in the world (Ephesians 5:8).

These texts trace the central plot of the gospel from darkness through God’s newness of life and sight, to a new ethic of what is “good and right and true” (Ephesians 5:9). Our life is in a society that has mostly lost its way in the darkness of what is not good, not right, and not true. Those who draw close to God’s goodness, however, are not fated to such an existence, but can live alternatively in the world. We are, in the gospel, summoned to “make the most of the time” (Ephesians 5:16). – Walter Bruggemann

## [Scripture] Ephesians 5.8-14

8 For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light- 9 for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. 10 Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; 13 but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, 14 for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

Reread

1 Samuel 16.1-13 &  
John 9.1-41

**Question:** Where does your blindness lie with regard to expecting blessing from God and others, while withholding those elements of God’s grace through your own hands on His behalf—His forgiveness? The blind beggar in John 9 is spoken about and not to; people feel free to use him as an object lesson. But John 9 is not a story about one man’s blindness, but rather what and whom the rest of us do not see.