**Sermon Psalm 23 - 22 March 2020**

In all of my 63 years I have never lacked a thing. My parents were not wealthy, but we always had more than enough good food and clothes, a roof over our head and a comfortable place to sleep. Things have never changed since I was a child. Sure there have been times when we struggled to make ends meet, especially when I was studying at the Seminary with Caryn and our two children living on Austudy, but we always had the essentials of life. My father knew what it meant to be lacking basic needs. As a twelve year old, at the end of WWII, he had to regularly leave the city and walk to the surrounding countryside stealing potatoes from the farmer’s fields to provide for the family. I on the other hand I have never wanted for anything.

This week for the first time I was confronted with the possibility that I may have to do without. We went to three supermarkets and they were all out of toilet paper. We eventually got a few rolls because of the kindness of one of the staff members in our local supermarket. My sister in Queensland could not find any meat in her supermarket. For over 60 years Australians have come to expect that they can go to the supermarket and buy all the basic necessities of life. For 60 years most Australians have lacked for nothing, now for a time at least things have changed.

Most of the current shortages are not really shortages at all. There is plenty of toilet paper and there will continue to be enough toilet paper, if only certain people would stop hoarding it. After all how much toilet paper can you fit in your house? In the meantime the situation we find ourselves in can be very frightening.

Something else frightened me this week. I found out that because of an ongoing medical condition I have a higher risk than most of getting severe symptoms should I catch COVID-19. Under normal circumstances I would expect to have medical treatment should the worst occur. What scared me was the fact that if we don’t manage to control the current outbreak our health system will be overwhelmed and there may be a lack of treatment available. I have never lacked anything, now suddenly I may not just lack toilet paper but I and many others may lack access to essential medical treatment.

How quickly it seems things can get out of hand. How fragile our presumption that we will always have all we need. How quickly we can become frightened.

It is at times like this that we are reminded of the things that are really important. Over the coming weeks more of us may be forced into self-isolation making us more aware of our need for social interaction and relationship. We need to love and be loved. That is the way God has made us. In time many of us may find that the lack of human contact is more difficult to bear than the temporary shortage of some basic supplies. What we need most of all to get us through all of the difficulties that life throws at us is God.

What a blessing it is in uncertain times like this to know that we are not alone. In the very centre of psalm 23 are the words “you are with me” vs 4 (NIV). It is as if the writer of the psalm is telling us that central to everything else written in the psalm is this one very important fact, God is with us. When times are uncertain, when the whole world seems to have gone mad, you are not alone. When for the first time in decades and maybe the first time in your lifetime there seems to be a lack of the basic essentials of life, you are not alone. When you are isolated for days maybe even weeks and months, you are not alone, God is with you. God has always been with you and he certainly will not leave you all alone now.

God is with you and that means you shall not lack the very thing that you need to get through any difficulties you may face. We may lack some essential goods and services but we will not lack the presence of God. We will not lack what we need for our souls. When fear enters your heart and darkness enters your life, God will be with you giving you guidance and comfort. When you feel under threat, you are not alone, God is on your side.

Knowing that God is with you means you can react differently to those people who panic and hoard at the expense of others. Instead, knowing God is with you, you can stay calm and be generous to others, care for those in need and put up with any inconvenience and enforced isolation. Knowing God is with you and is on your side you can be considerate to others and care for those in need. In this way others too will experience God’s presence through your love for them.

This week we have been reminded once again of our mortality and the fragility of life. As we see the numbers of dead from the COVID-19 virus rise, every day we are reminded how precious life is. In the face of our mortality we are comforted by Psalm 23, because through Jesus Christ we will not lack the one thing we all need when our final hour comes, God with us! Immanuel walking with us through the valley of death. Immanuel, taking us to the house of the Lord where we will live feasting with him forever.

We are going through uncertain times and we may lack some of the things we have for a very long time taken for granted, but we are not alone, our shepherd is with us. We know who our shepherd is, the Good Shepherd who has been through the valley of death and came through to the other side, resurrected and victorious. The Good Shepherd is with us restoring our souls, comforting us and surrounding us with his goodness and mercy every day.

**Amen.**

***Pastor Rolf***