**Psalm** **23**:4              (EASTER 4)                        294.

            An old legend tells how King David used to hang his harp over his couch as he slept at night in the open and let the wind blow through the strings. The resulting music expressed every emotion of which the human heart is capable. So thrilled was David that he would get up and write words to fit the music, so producing his many psalms. As with many of the old legends, this one, too, is just too good to be true. But it does point to a truth. The psalms of David do speak to most of the experiences which men and women have whether it be 3,000 years ago or today. It comes as no surprise then that in his 23rd psalm, the best known of them all, David has something to say about death.

            You know David had been brought up on the land. There he continually came into contact not only with living things, but also with the dying. On a number of occasions death had laid its hand on a friend of his, on a member of his family, and it had hurt David. He knew that some day death would also lay its hand on him. All of this he faced realistically, bravely and confidently and then sang: **The** **Lord** **is…………………….death**.

            People have always been afraid of death and probably you are no exception. In fact, you possibly fear death more than anything else. You know it will come. You know it may come at any time. You may not give much conscious thought to it and what it may mean. You may not be openly concerned about whether there be life after death  except in time of grief or when you have just experienced your first heart attack, but deep down you may still fear it. Unless we have thought about it and

come to grips with our anxiety over it, we are likely to kid ourselves that although death may lay its hand on others, it will not lay its hand on us. We like to think that our highly developed abilities in surgery and medicine will keep its hand away from us  at least for some time yet. And all the time we are cowards, afraid to face reality  so afraid that we may regard any talk of death as being morbid. Women are tempted to lie about their age and dollars are spent to keep others from seeing that we are getting older and, of course, then much closer to dying. We like to kid ourselves that if we have taken out enough life insurance the problem of death has been met. A father happily announced to his family that he had taken out a large policy that would see to his family's happiness. His small son asked: Dad, does this mean that you are not going to die? His father was caught by surprise. After some hesitation he said: No, it really means the opposite. I am going to die. But when I do you and the rest of the family will have enough money to take care of yourselves. The little fellow was not satisfied. He asked: What about you, dad? Will you be taken care of when you die? Fortunately the father was a Christian man with firm faith in God's promises and could tell his son: Yes, I will be ok. I have eternal life insurance, too. God stands behind that. The policy reads:

"*God* *so* *loved* life."

A sensible and brave person will face all the facts of life and one of them  the one that really wraps up all the others  is the fact of death. When you can consider it properly, you can prepare for it and it will not take you by surprise. Only when you have overcome your fear of death are you free to live life richly in every experience whether painful or pleasant.

            From the shocking moment when Adam first bent over the dead form of his son, Abel, killed by his own brother Cain, death has been man's enemy  an enemy he has not been able to escape and who finally appears to win the struggle for the life that is in him. We have been able to push the battle-line back somewhat so that most of us will probably live a good deal longer than previous generations did. But the battle-line is still there. It may yet be pushed back even further, but in the end death always appears to win. So from the beginning people have asked again and again: is there another life after death? Job put our question into words when he asked: "*If* a *man* *die*, *will* *he* *live* *again*?" Some have searched nature for evidence of another life. They carved on their gravestones the butterfly emerging from its cocoon. They wrote about a legendary bird called the Phoenix which was supposed to rise to life from its own ashes. They have pointed to the return of spring as a sign of returning life. But they ARE only pictures. They prove nothing. King David had something more. He had such faith in life after death that he could write: **Though** I **walk** **THROUGH** **the** ... **death**. It was necessary at times for a shepherd to lead his flock through dark valleys and ravines. David knew that one day he would eventually be led through the valley of death. But he uses two words that take away the gloom of death. He called death a **SHADOW** – something real, but not nearly as powerful as it seemed. And with the other word he opened up the valley on the other side and let the light come shining in. He said: **Though** I **walk** **THROUGH** .... **death**. For him, death was not some place where he was going to stay. It was only a passage through which he must pass. The light, of the opening at the other end of the passage gave him confidence. He could speak with deep conviction. The God of his fathers, the creator of heaven and earth would be there. The God who had led his forefather Abraham to the promised land would be there. The God who had led the people out of Egypt and through the desert would be there. The God who had graciously forgiven David his adultery and murder and who had promised a Saviour like a shepherd that God would lead him safely through the valley of the shadow of death.

            David did not think it necessary to state proof of this conviction. He just stated it. Let’s face it! There is no invincible scientific proof of life beyond death. You can't collect a whole lot of evidence that will MAKE a man believe in it. The conviction that there is a resurrection does not depend so much on any argument. It springs from a person and that person is Jesus Christ, the risen Lord. If you know him, you need no further proof. If you do not know him, no amount of argument will convince you. We believe in life after death because we believe in Jesus Christ. Today all over the world Christians will be confessing, as they do every Sunday, "I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting." But before they do they will say "I believe in Jesus Christ God's only son our Lord who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, was dead, buried and the third day rose again." He is the Jesus who said: "I *am* *the* *Resurrection*    ... *not* *die*." Now while we cannot PROVE this to be so, there is some sort of evidence. But personally I have received more help and assurance in observing  how those who do know Jesus live and die than I have from any amount of argument or proof of the resurrection - sitting by the sick and dying and praying with them **Though** I ... **evil**, watching them die with confidence does more to strengthen one's own conviction than all the talk in the world. A minister who just buried his wife said: "For years I have encouraged my people to believe God's promises, especially the promise of the resurrection in Jesus Christ. Now it has become important to me. He paused for a moment and then added: Thank God, I have it. And it works.” That is not to hide the ugliness of death. It is to face it with sadness but also with a smile. When Luther's 14 year old daughter lay dying  in his arms he said.. My dear Lena. how strange it is to know that you are in peace and that all is well and yet still to be so sad. In time God healed his sorrow and his faith was strengthened.

                      Friends, sure about the resurrection because you know Jesus Christ as the risen Lord, you can take hold of the present life with courage and joy. You can say: I am going to live life to the full until I die and then I am going to live eternally. A certain king is said to have been inspired by a servant who he had wake him every morning with the words: Remember, 0 king, that you are mortal. You will die.  How much more inspiring it is for us who believe in the risen Christ!  How much more inspiring to get up every morning with the good news ringing in our ears: Remember, in Christ, you are immortal. You shall not die, but live.