

Recently, I've been seeking the Lord. I need him. Isn't that when we look for him? I was seeking some answers. This is some of the results of my quest. It came through my imagination, which he instilled in me. A story which brought me a smile.

Psalms 23:1 *The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.*

He was there before I arrived. Surrounded by lambs and other animals, he looked comfortable perched on a big boulder. Though his presence shocked me he was not surprised to see me. He smiled, and patted a space on the rock beside him.

I blinked, in shock. Not surprising, since just a split second ago I had been on the tiny patio of my home, sobbing and praying for the Lord's peace and guidance. Not joy. I was mourning. Another of those events had occurred. People had been hurt, and some had died.

The selfish grief that I was expressing had a base of reality. But much of it was for me. Alone, broke most of the time, struggling in a world I did not feel as though I belonged. So I prayed. My gaze went upward, to heaven, where God would hear me. No stars presented themselves under the city lights. The moon was almost full. Clouds drifted across it, almost completely covering it.

Twin beams of light flashed downward, lifting me up. I had time to blink three times. The lights consolidated and brightened so that I had to raise my hand over my face and shut my eyes. When I opened them, I was here, in the daylight, by a stream, with the smell of wild honeysuckle wafting by. Birds twittered and the flow of the stream was calming. It was the Lord who drew my attention, however.

First, I noticed his eyes. Brown, sweet, happy eyes they were. When I looked into them, they glowed. The joy that emanated from them overcame me and I could not resist it. I also could not stand it for long. My own green eyes dropped. The overpowering sensation of delight only decreased to a bearable level. I could not help the chuckles that burst from my throat.

While avoiding his eyes for a moment I observed his sun tanned face, his brown hair flowing to just below his shoulders, the traditional garb that I always imagined the savior to wear. Shepherd's ware, a blue robe and sandals. I noted the scars on his ankles and winced, looking away. Ugly, evil scars. The laughter froze. My eyes are drawn back to his own, which carry none of the sorrow I would imagine for someone who had gone through what he had.

I had noticed nothing of my surroundings yet. Everything else is dim beside him and his beautiful eyes. They satisfied my every want. Peace. Comfort. Relief. Courage. And joy.

But for a mere mortal, it was too much. Suddenly, I could not breathe. I could not stand. I wanted to fall on my knees and worship him. But a part of me wanted to run to him and fling myself like a child on a parent, or on an older sibling. He nodded. Did he want me? Really? Still he smiled and reached out for me.

A rose bush bloomed beside him on his rock. It was a wild variety, and it bloomed profusely. I noticed there were no thorns. Secretly, I peeked back at the Lord. He cocked his head, still smiling. I bit my lip.

Alarms screamed in my mind. This was not real. I was dreaming. The Good Shepherd was not standing just three feet away, with his arms outstretched. Not me. I didn't deserve it. Nothing real could give me my wants, though he truly had just a moment ago.

Psalms 23:2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

I am a foolish sheep, like so many people. I turned and ran from my Lord, and the wondrous delight he brought my spirit. My awkward feet bounced off soft ground covered in green grass. My usually sore left knee throbbed every time I raised it. Sheep can be very dumb, and I had been bewildered to the point of stupidity. So I ran away, wiping tears off my face as I chugged along.

The poor shell of a body that I don't maintain well couldn't go far, or fast. Soon, I was going into a wooded area. I slowed to a walk. The trees waved a bit in the wind. Was there going to be a storm? No birds sang. No animals chattered. A thorn bush grabbed me and I had to fight for release. In the end I was badly scratched. Now I could see there were plenty more of the thorns. Rustling noises caught me by surprise. Who or what was behind me? Fear clutched me and choked me. I fled, tripping over branches, stumbling on rocks and uneven earth. Again I could not traverse far. Winded and weary, I bent at the waist and gasped for air while clinging to a tree limb.

A heavy drop of rain landed on my face. I was not crying now. But I wanted to. With a deep breath I kept my feet moving forward. The grey clouds above me opened.

The downpour was powerful, and the wind splashed the rain into my shelter but I managed to stay mostly dry under a massive, old willow tree. A family of squirrels joined me in this place. They were not afraid, though they didn't come near. I stayed

still and quiet. When the storm was over they left single file. The last baby wagged his tail and bolted to play with its siblings. I stayed still. They had not been afraid. I was. Had I just run away from the Lord himself?

A cry drew me out. What was that sound? Was it a child? Or an animal? I had been seated by the trunk of the tree. Standing was painful because my limbs had stiffened. Branches still waved in the wind. Was the storm really over? I limped out of my shelter and stretched. It felt good. But the knee still hurt. The limp remained. My eyes sought out the source of the sound I had heard. The forest remained still. A clean scent rose from the ground. The rain had cleaned the world as it should. But I felt grubby. My clothes were wrinkled and sweat stained. My hair drooped from dampness. I pressed forward.

Thank goodness I could not go fast. The edge of the bank came up quickly, without notice. I almost fell down into the river. Instead, I fell back, almost falling down before catching myself on a tree.

It would have been a ten foot drop. There was a very slim, rocky beach. The river ran fast and furious. Had the storm filled it so quickly? Waves crashed over stones and branches lodged along the way. Gasps overtook my poor overloaded lungs and I fought for air. Would my heart come out of my body? It felt like it could, pounding heavily.

Then I heard the scream. From the corner of my mind something was swooping toward me. Something with a cruel beak and cold eyes. The raptor soared high, sailing down the river in search of prey. In this place, would he land on me? Blind me? My chest tightened yet again.

I looked up, and the sun pierced my eyes. Quickly, I shut them. When it seemed safe to reopen them, slowly, the raptor had passed. His wings flapped and then he soared. It was magnificent to watch.

Now my heavy breathing had stopped, and so had my heart. Would they be able to restart? Yes. They did, pounding and throbbing uncontrollably. Thud. Thud! I wished I was back with the Lord. But I had fled him, his beauty and gentleness. I sobbed.

Across the river, below, a doe and her fawn stepped out to drink from the river. A robin sat on the lowest branch of a very old, very tall, cedar tree and sang his heart out. A pair of wrens skipped in some brush not too far away. The sun sparkled on the water and in the air. But tears still rolled down my cheeks. I sat on a log, not caring

that it was damp or that there might be bugs lurking. My heart was breaking. I didn't know where I was. My arm was bleeding from a thorn scratch. I snuffled.

A hand lay gently on my shoulder. I cried on. Someone sat down beside me, laying their arm over my neck and drawing me onto their own shoulder. I cried on.

When I could not sob one more sob I closed my eyes. Whose breast was I laying on, like a child? I looked up.

It was he. Sitting on the log beside me. The King of Kings, Lord of Lords. And he loved me. It was all I had ever wanted, even when I did not know. It was all I could ever want.

Now the silence reigned. It felt right. The King and I walked back. Now I could see a path open just for me. He had his arm around me. I had mine around him. My cheek rested on his chest. He carried me over some of the rocky places. Soon we were out of the woods and then we were at the place he had called me to. The river had settled into a chuckling trickle which flowed from a natural spring and a waterfall just around the bend.

Psalms 23:3 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

There is no way to describe the restoration of my soul. In this day I had lied. My boss asked me if I had completed a task and I had answered yes, though I had not. Earlier today I had snarled at someone who had asked me a simple question. It was too simple and I could not stand their stupidity. I spoke tersely to them. How was I to know they were feeling bad from a cold and just couldn't focus as they normally would? I had cursed someone silently for getting ahead of me on the bus so they got a seat of their own and I had to share. There had not been an ounce of gratitude for my rice and bean dinner. I had wanted a pizza but couldn't afford it.

All of these sins were cleansed away without discussion, along with many more. Wrong choices over a life partner in my past had cost me a home and a family. Helplessness had held me back from helping people I should have. Laziness had cost me opportunities I didn't know existed. Tears had fallen over them, but the Lord told me to put them away. "You are my child. I paid for those sins." What could I say? "I'll try to do better, Savior." But he drew me away from the self-reproach to be happy in the moment.

Grief had passed over me that day. Pain had surprised me when I was accused of something I had not done and would never do by someone I trusted. Christ soothed

my pain and misery. The next moment was of complete peace, joy, and freedom. There was no need to be anyone but who I am.

Now I could see the way to righteousness, not only in what I did, but how I thought and felt. Goodness is only good in his name's sake. Everything else is fake.

Now I could see Paul's point about being a child and growing up, about looking in a mirror and only seeing part of the image, dimly. I thought of the moon, full and brilliant, then covered in clouds and sharing next to no light. My days were so much like these similes! But I had Christ's assurance. I could not see it all, but he could. My shepherd would lead me if only I didn't flee him. Righteousness could only be in his presence.

Psalm 23:4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Death. I was afraid of it, really. Not knowing about that mystery was frightening. But Christ had been through it. He had conquered it. Though he died he is alive. "Will you really be with me, my Lord?" I asked, trembling and not sure I wanted the answer. "Until the end of time, little girl." I liked that. A little girl. But the subject of death still hung over me. "What is it like, Jesus?" "Nay, child. I may tell you sometime. But not now. Mysteries do not have to be feared. Why else would you enjoy a good mystery book?" I blushed. Sometimes it's the mystery, sometimes a romance. But I love the suspense. He smiled. "Trust in me and you will know that death is nothing to fear." I swallowed, and made a decision to believe. He gave me the strength, and the knowledge of his might comforted me.

He handed me his staff. I took it, and unwillingly use it to stepped off the rock, away from his arms. It held me up, despite my sore knee. He wanted me to practice my walk. The bad knee almost buckled and I leaned on the tool he had given me. It was good, though not as good as his arm. "I need my arm." He laughed. He was holding a lamb, feeding it. I cocked my head, leaned on his staff and smiled at the picture that came straight out of my nursery. But this was real. "

"I'll always give you what you need. It may not be in a form that you want. But I want to give you every comfort that I can. Not a fancy, costly walking stick. There's nothing wrong with them for those people that can get them. Sometimes it will be a hand carved shepherd's staff. Or a rod to keep what you fear away. Sin, wild animals, predators of all sorts." He gazed at me with love. I dropped my eyes. It was becoming too much again. But I didn't want to run now. I just needed a moment of relief. One day I will be better equipped to be in the presence of my sovereign.

“Let’s eat!” his voice was joyous as he waved an arm and a feast appeared.

Psalm 23: 5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

A picnic! It was perfect. Fresh, hot rolls in a basket. A bowl of hot corn on the cob, a bowl of carrots, one of peas, and another of fresh cheese. A large picture of milk. A bowl of butter. There were assorted berries, and nuts, already cracked. A pot of thick cream. Cheese. The table was covered in a red checkered cloth. And there wasn’t an ant to be seen.

Shouts came from across the river. I stared. Was that me expressing fear and humiliation? Was that a boy who had thrown rocks at me when I was young jumping up and down while yelling? The man who had tried to seduce me when I was twenty looked silly in his mustache and toupee as his face twitched in some feeble attempt to attract my attention. More adversaries were behind them. I realized they were not real, but shadows of my own experiences and I turned away. There was no need to look again when I could look at Jesus all day and be happy. I sat down across from my lord and I bowed my head in prayer before partaking this feast.

Psalm 23:6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

It was a delightful repast and I laughed almost constantly. The enemies across the river had disappeared. I knew I was in heaven. “Nay. My child. You are not dead. When you die, you will rest under the Fathers throne until the end of time.” He told me. “Then heaven and earth will be new, and you will take your place as my child, a citizen of my world, well rested from your sleep.”

I was confused, and suddenly doubtful. Did I have to return to my place in the cold, cruel world after this taste of paradise? My eyes filled with tears. But he touched my hand and peace flooded my heart. “You will take this with you. My goodness and mercy shall follow you. Tomorrow, when your boss is cross because you did not meet her expectations. When a member of the church you dropped out of meets up with you and invites you back. When your bus is held up because of a sport event. The next day, when you have the day off but no money to go anywhere or do anything fun. You will make hats for newborns and donate them to your hospital, sharing my goodness in your own special way. Maybe you will make a casserole for a shut in, and share it on Sunday for lunch. Your pastor will have the woman’s name who could enjoy it. That’s the pastor of the church you dropped out of. It’s not perfect. But neither are you.”

He smiled, and I felt a glow through me. Then I opened my eyes. I hadn't realized they had been closed. The beams of light had dimmed far into the black night sky. I was on my balcony, in my pajamas and robe but no slippers. My tears had ceased. I was back in this pitiful world, right outside my sad little studio apartment. But as I slid the door open my eyes could still see the beauty of the house of the Lord. He had spoken of the Father's many mansions. That was for later. For now, I thought about my current abode. "I think I will put on the blue sofa and chair set, and that soft blue rug in the center of the room." I thought, with a smile. Then I went to bed and slept through the night.