

PEAKS AND VALLEYS

It is in late April and early May when ambitious mountain climbers try their best to ascend Mount Everest. Every year around this time I pay attention to the news to see how many people successfully reach the summit, how many fail and how many perish. I have always been interested to read climbers' testimonies about their struggles to conquer the world's highest mountain.

However, Mount Everest is quiet at this moment. No permits were granted to climbers this year. With no activity taking place on the peak of Everest this summer the only activity will be in the valley below.

We find ourselves in the valley as we endure this COVID-19 pandemic. From our position in the valley the peaks are looking quite high and intimidating.

- The peaks in our unemployment numbers in Canada seem immense.
- The peaks of businesses closed and perhaps never reopening is frightening.
- The peaks in our feelings of depression, anxiety, and worry are crippling at times.
- The peak of uncertainty about when things will begin to reopen seems a mountain.

It is not easy for us to be in the valley during this COVID-19 pandemic, but thankfully we are not alone in this valley.

Naturally when we think of valleys, Psalm 23 comes to mind. The psalmist David starts off this familiar Psalm with recognizing the Lord as his shepherd. It is an interesting analogy that David uses for his relationship with God considering David himself was a shepherd at one point too.

David is identifying himself as a *sheep* as opposed to shepherd. David knew better than anybody how sheep are completely dependant on their shepherd for protection. With Jesus calling Himself the Good Shepherd we are His sheep – not frightened or passive but rather obedient followers wise enough to know He cares for us and has our best interest in mind.

David acknowledged these aspects that the Lord his shepherd has done for him in verse 2 and 3. It is in verse 4 where David makes reference to life's moments in the valleys:

- ***Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I fear no evil for thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.***

Before Jesus' death on the cross, death cast a frightening shadow over people because they felt totally helpless in its presence. David understood though that the God of life was walking him through this valley and was bringing him safely to the other side.

The shadows being cast by COVID-19 have been vast and dark. Most of us have never seen or experienced shadows like this in our lifetime. As frightening and helpless as we might feel at this moment in this valley, we need to allow ourselves to be led by our Good Shepherd through this time of uncertainty. As verse 4 reminds us, as we follow our Good Shepherd during this valley season in our lives, we will feel His presence and sense how He is relieving us of fear and settling our hearts at peace.

It is a unique and challenging valley we are in right now. There are still so many uncertainties as we continue to journey through this valley. One thing we do know for certain is God is with us, caring for us and helping us each step of the way.

This spring there will be no climbers at the top of the peak of Mount Everest. This is a spring that is being spent in life's valleys. Thankfully, we are being led and guided through this unpleasant valley by our Good Shepherd. *Follow Me the Master Said* is a hymn, but it is also good advice as we live in the valley of COVID-19.

Blessings,

Rev. Dean