

*1The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.*

*2He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;*

*3he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.*

*4Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me.*

*5You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.*

*6Surely 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.*

It is a great story for children. Two armies lined up for battle on opposite sides of a valley - fighting men, hardened, tough. And as I like to imagine it, alone in the very middle of the valley, one man, standing tall – Goliath – taunting - mocking the whole army of Israel.

*“Send someone to fight me, if he kills me, your side wins, if I kill him, we win.”*

But not a single fighting man of Israel stepped forward for Goliath was nearly ten feet tall.

Yes, no one was brave enough to fight Goliath until a young boy, not even old enough to be a soldier, stepped forward.

David. His father Jesse had sent him with food for his brothers who were in the army of Israel. When he heard the taunting of Goliath, the boy, too young to be a soldier, volunteered.

*He told the king, “Your servant used to keep sheep for his father; and whenever a lion or a bear came, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after it and struck it down, rescuing the lamb from its mouth; and if it turned against me I would catch it by the jaw, strike it down and kill it. The Lord who saved me from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine.”*

So armed with only with his shepherd’s staff, five smooth stones and a sling in his hand, the shepherd boy stood against Goliath.

*Goliath cursed David by the gods he worshipped. “Am I a dog that you come to me with sticks? Come to me and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the field.”*

*But David said to Goliath, “You come to me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts.”*

*David put his hand in his bag, took out a stone, slung it and struck the Philistine on his forehead; the stone shank into his forehead and he fell face down on the ground.*

What a wonderful story for children.

In this world where problems seem so big, and we so small, to hear of the boy with faith striking down a giant must give many children new hope.

And they pray. "Lord, make my mom and dad stop drinking, stop fighting, stop hitting me."

"Lord, give me some friends."

"Lord, make them stop laughing at me."

"Lord, keep grandma alive."

Oh, our children pray. How intensely they pray.

But Goliath doesn't fall.

Yes, what a wonderful story for children: Little lambs, grazing in the pastures of the Lord.

*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want, he makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside still waters, he restores my soul, he leads me in paths of righteousness for his names sake.*

The shepherd king, David, wrote these words. They are words for a simple world, a simple faith.

But what do they have to do with having more bills than having money to pay them?

What do they have to do with a world where children are molested, and elderly patients are mocked by the people they are paying for their care?

What do these words have to do with houses being broken into, and jobs being lost?

David did not stay a shepherd boy. The crowds cheered him as a mighty warrior - his own king, jealous of him, sent armies after him.

He had a friend, Jonathon; David loved him as he loved his own life.

Jonathon was killed in battle.

David had a dear son, Absalom. His son turned against him, tried to take the kingship from him. Absalom was killed by David's loyal soldiers. David was heartbroken.

No, David did not remain a little lamb in the green pasture.

There is a word right in the middle of David's psalm. In the Hebrew 26 words come before it, twenty six words after. This very middle word signals a great change in the psalm.

The word is you.

Suddenly David doesn't speak about the Lord this and the Lord that.

Suddenly he prays, "You." *Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you are with me, your rod and your staff they comfort me.*

*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies, you anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows.*

Will God answer prayer?

Our children want to know. Will I get what I want?

As we speak to the one stronger than we are, we think that answering prayer is the most important thing that God could do.

But as we walk the dark valleys we need one to accompany us - someone to speak to.

You, Lord. You.

Next week six young people will be confirmed in their faith. We have tried to teach them all about the Lord. Facts, truths, habits, history we teach all of these.

But what will finally matter is not that they know this or that about God, but that they speak this one word to God, "You."

*"I am the good shepherd," says Jesus. "I know my own and my own know me." Not strangers, distant but belonging to Jesus, belonging together.*

For every day we and our children face Goliath. Every day we must walk down into that valley to face what we fear. And it is not enough to know that the Lord is somewhere where the pastures are green and waters are still. We need to know that You are with me, Your rod and Your staff they comfort me.

*"I am the good shepherd," says Jesus. "The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."*

Some Christian teachers say this is the story we should not tell our children. The Son of David, the Son of God went down into the valley to face the Goliath of death. And this David, named Jesus was struck down. He laid down his life for the sheep.

Yes, some say we should not tell our children this story, that the Son of God was struck down - just like grandma and grandpa will be struck down, and mom and dad.

Yes tell them about the shepherd boy who wins, and tell them that they will always win too with God on their side. But don't tell them of Jesus the good shepherd whom Goliath struck down.

How can children understand?

How can we?

*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and your staff they comfort me.*

Finally everything depends on the one David prayed to; the one Jesus prayed to. We cannot strike down Goliath. But the good shepherd who laid down his life has been raised from the dead.

Goliath has fallen.

The children's story will be ours after all for it is Jesus' story. For our story will be the story of the one who will take us through the valley of the shadow of death, through death and beyond and bring us to his green pastures and flowing waters and Jesus will be our Good Shepherd forever.

Thanks be to God.