

Finding Safety – The Lord is My Shepherd

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The Word is full of teachings about turning to the Lord and finding safety there. The 23rd Psalm is the most famous. We can imagine being able to walk through the valley of the shadow of death without fear because of the Lord's presence. We can imagine feeling so confident in the Lord's protection that we can eat a meal calmly without any digestive problems, despite enemies being all around. We can imagine thinking of life as being led to abundance and safety, described by the green pastures and still waters.

These images are important because we know there is anxiety all around us – in politics, in world conflict, in media. And there is anxiety and fear in us – in the ways we are not living up to what we know we should. Consider this oft-quoted teaching: "Peace holds within itself trust in the Lord, the trust that He governs all things and provides all things, and that He leads towards an end that is good. When a person believes these things about Him he is at peace, since he fears nothing and no anxiety about things to come disturbs him." (AC 8455) If we trust the Lord, we have no fear and no anxiety. How many of us are in that place?

There's a stark contrast, at times, between the beautiful, transcendent imagery in Scripture, and the reality that we face. There are many reasons this is so. One is that we are all on the pathway of learning to trust the Lord. Our life's work is to shun what is evil and do good, based on what the Lord told us. As we do this, our trust and sense of safety grows.

Another reason is that we don't know a lot of things within ourselves, about the Lord and about spiritual reality. The hells use our ignorance to create feelings of impossible danger, or our incapacity to change anything. This is one of the reasons we need to be lifelong learners, reading the Word every day.

Another reason relates to being in the natural world and seeing natural appearances rather than spiritual reality. And for those who have suffered trauma or abuse, the earthly experiences might have created such strong wounds that the Lord's peace and safety has a hard time getting through. This is why people can find that going to a therapist can help them with their spiritual as well as their psychological lives.

Ultimately, we find safety when we consciously decide to focus on what is internal over what is external. There will always be reasons to be anxious or fearful on the outside, and if we wait for that to fall away, we will be in trouble. Peace comes only from paying attention to the Lord's presence, regardless of the external circumstances. The 37th Psalm describes this: "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass. Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; do not fret – it only causes harm. For evildoers shall be cut off; but those who wait on the Lord, they shall inherit the earth." The whole point of trusting in the Lord is to trust, not when things are going well and there is universal peace, but when things are seemingly not going well, when the wicked appear to carry out their schemes. Can we believe the Lord is present and powerful even then?

The Lord said, "In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." This is the challenge of finding peace. How can we pay attention to what is happening around us, noticing the unsafety in it, and yet choose to believe that the Lord has and can overcome that?

Lessons: Psalm 23, 37:1-11; *Arcana Coelestia* 8478:3-5