

A comfort blanket

Caroline Hodgson *reflects on* Psalm 23

Psalm 23 is one of the best-known passages of the Bible. How wonderful, in time of trial and tribulation, to read and hear this confirmation that God cares for and protects us. The words of the psalm are also familiar as the hymn, "The King of Love My Shepherd Is", written in 1868 by Henry Baker. The tune that most people will know is *Dominus Regit Me*, composed by John Bacchus Dykes (1823-1876). Together, these familiar words and beautiful music have reassured generations of Christians and, indeed, people of other faiths and none.

But for all its familiarity the psalm is no comfort blanket, although it can provide great solace when we need it to. But there's a challenge here, too – namely to learn to depend utterly on God – something that many of us find surprisingly difficult. We want to be self-reliant, and we rebel against being made to "lie down in green pastures", being led "beside still waters" and "in right paths". We want to find those pastures, waters and paths for ourselves.

Yet another Victorian Christian, Hudson Taylor, wrote these amazing words when he was gravely ill: "I am so weak that I can hardly write, I cannot read my Bible, I cannot even pray, I can only lie still in God's arms like a little child, and trust." This, perhaps, is one of the great lessons of Psalm 23. 🐾

Good Shepherd, you lead me, feed me and restore my soul. Help me to know deep in my heart that "you are with me", and to learn to relax into your love and care, in the sure knowledge that I am held by you, for ever. Amen.

Christian Aid Week
(11-17 May)

by Caroline Hodgson

Poverty pushed Aline to the brink of survival. But she was determined to push back against the inhumanity of poverty, driven by hope, faith and the love of her children. Aline transformed her life with a little help from Christian Aid.

Christian Aid reported that during Christian Aid Week last year people "walked, ran, cycled, danced, prayed, quizzed, and so much more". Many churches organise house-to-house collections each year. Volunteers usually take a

couple of local roads, delivering the envelopes and returning a few days later to collect them.

Just five pounds could enable someone to set up the small business that takes them out of poverty, while a hundred pounds could provide ten people with the training that supports their families to set up small businesses, such as selling home-grown vegetables.

It's not too late to think up some ideas: www.christianaid.org.uk/appeals/key-appeals/christian-aid-week 🐾

“God never tires of forgiving us; we are the ones who tire of seeking his mercy.”

Pope Francis

LGBTQ+ Church
Part 1 – the opportunity

by Jayne Ozanne

Jayne Ozanne recalls an encounter that would change the course of LGBTQ+ history.

What would you say to one of the most influential people in the world if you had just thirty seconds? That was the dilemma I was faced with in November 2019 when I was invited to meet Pope Francis at the Vatican. I contemplated long and hard about what to say and decided to appeal to his pastoral heart.

"Your Grace, I am a gay evangelical Anglican from England," I opened – at which his eyebrows shot right up (whether it was the "gay", "evangelical" or

"Anglican" I remain unsure). I continued, "I grew up being told I would never be a mother, a grandmother or a wife because I was gay – and it nearly killed me."

Grabbing both my hands, he asked me to pray for him. The next day I was invited to hear him give a speech where he rebuked leaders who condemned LGBTQ+ people.

Jayne is a well-known gay evangelical who is a writer, academic and human rights campaigner. She lives in Guernsey with her cat, Leo, where she enjoys sea swimming, kayaking and cliff walks. 🐾