

Dear all

My former diocese, Southwark Diocese, had 2 Mark Williamses (is that the plural? Marks Williams?). We both jokingly referred to ourselves as 'the other Mark Williams', but actually it should probably have been me that was described thus. I trained at the same training college, a couple of years after him, and arrived at Southwark Diocese after him. We would occasionally receive communications meant for 'the other one'.

I suspect I was not in as bad a situation as St Jude however. Luke records, in the list of disciples, *Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.* 2x Simon, 2x James and 2x Judas! No wonder early Christian writers wanted to change his name, to differentiate him from the traitor (other gospels don't mention him at all – we assume that Thaddeus is the same person). No wonder he is the patron saint of desperate cases and lost causes.

Today is the feast day of Ss Philip & James (Pip and Jim as they are often irreverently referred to). For us, James is 'the other James'. Our patron saint is James the son of Zebedee, brother of John; St James the Greater. Today's James is the son of Alphaeus, possibly the 'James the Younger' whose mother was at the crucifixion – known sometimes as 'James the Less'. Hopefully there is no rivalry amongst the saints in heaven, and that James 'the Greater' has lost the arrogance that he often shows in the gospel!

Traditionally, though with little evidence, James the Less has been identified with James the brother of Jesus (possibly cousin, rather than sibling) and the leader of the Jerusalem church, martyred in around 62 AD, also called James the Just. It is this James that is traditionally considered the author of the Epistle (or at least perhaps the giver of sermons edited into the epistle).

The idea of their being a 'pecking order' among the saints can produce a wry smile. Who is the saintliest? Whose 'saintliness' is the most powerful? After all, in Luke 9 we read *An argument arose among [the disciples] as to which one of them was the greatest. But Jesus, aware of their inner thoughts, took a little child and put it by his side, and said to them, "Whoever welcomes this child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me; for the least among all of you is the greatest."*

Very much following on from the theme yesterday of the gifts or roles in the church, the idea of greatest or least should be anathema to Christians. We are all sinners, redeemed by the grace of God. All are equal, because all are equally loved by God.

John Worthington has asked me to mention that the May 'issue' of Priory News is now available online? It is to be found at <https://www.dsj.org.uk/magazine/may2020.pdf>

And in a similar vein, *I'd rather be in Deeping* is also online:

https://issuu.com/zerosixdesign/docs/deeping_may

Today's reflection from St Paul's Cathedral:

The Lord is My Shepherd: Specially-commissioned reflections on the wisdom of the Psalms for a time of Pandemic

Psalms 23 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

The Divine Shepherd

A Psalm of David.

- ¹ The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.
² He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; ^a
³ he restores my soul. ^b He leads me in right paths ^c for his name's sake.
⁴ Even though I walk through the darkest valley, ^d I fear no evil;
for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me.
⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
⁶ Surely ^e goodness and mercy ^f shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long. ^g

Footnotes:

- a. Psalm 23:2 Heb *waters of rest*
- b. Psalm 23:3 Or *life*
- c. Psalm 23:3 Or *paths of righteousness*
- d. Psalm 23:4 Or *the valley of the shadow of death*
- e. Psalm 23:6 Or *Only*
- f. Psalm 23:6 Or *kindness*
- g. Psalm 23:6 Heb *for length of days*

You may be able recite this psalm by heart. And, like me, you may have prayed it at the bedside of the dying, chanted it in a quiet sanctuary or entreated it earnestly to yourself in times of trouble. The words flow into and over us as balm to our souls. We breathe deeply the green of the pasture. Our heartbeat slows as we approach the still waters. We drink deeply of the assurance of God who fears neither death nor dark valleys, who leads us on a right path even through disasters. We sit at the table and know that there is enough, there is more than enough. The blessing hand has been laid on our shoulders; our cup overflows. Surely, goodness and mercy.

Psalm 23 is ballast for trying times. These days we need all the ballast we can get. We need the breath of peace, the kind that passes understanding, the kind the Good Shepherd breathed on his disciples in his post-resurrection appearances. We need the clear, cool stream of living water he poured into the thirsty woman's cup. We need the green, the growing newness of spring - life emerging from the empty tomb, that feeds body and soul.

When the world is topsy-turvy, when our own homes may feel like a prison, when the news is bad and the shadows are long, we are reminded of where our true Home lies. It lies in the hands of God who made heaven and earth, who walked amongst us and bore the worst humanity could dish out, who even now sighs too deep for words. Good Shepherd, Host and Friend, be with us now and forevermore.

Carla A. Grosch-Miller

Here is a recording of Stuart Townsend singing his version of this psalm:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pN4tPkX0MGO>

And here is a more traditional metrical version:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yHQoRfFr1rE>

Anglican chant:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eZpJEYC-21A>

Or Dibley!:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yLxdb3ov-zE>

Stay safe

Blessings and love

Mark