Monday 20th April

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me;

your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

Psalm 23:4

I remember a few years ago, an atheist bus ad that stated something like ‘There’s probably no God, so you may as well enjoy yourself’. Wrong on so many levels! Not least because the greatest joy this life affords comes solely from knowing this God (who does exist!), and lasting joy cannot be found without him. But also because, well, where does that leave you in painful times, when ‘enjoying yourself’ isn’t an option? No-one goes through life only experiencing green pastures and still waters. David’s Psalm is unwaveringly realistic - we also navigate the darkest valleys, or the valley of the shadow of death. No-one wants to go through those times, but we live in a fallen world. There is a sense in which we are walking through such a valley collectively at the moment, hearing devastating news of the affects of this virus every day. But David’s shepherd is not just there for the good times. David testifies, ‘you are with me’ and that makes all the difference. We have all known the help and comfort of another human being at times of loss or struggle and that can be transformative. How much more the Presence of the Lord himself - the one who has passed through the valley of the shadow of death and came out the other side alive! The one who went through it in order to rescue us in the first place! The one who has a proven track record in faithfulness. And His very Presence has the ability to drive out the fear of this place. Let’s be attentive to the gentle nudges of his rod and staff, as indicators of his loving presence with us, and guides as to the safest path through the valley. Oh, and the valley comes to an end.

*Lord Jesus, our Good Shepherd, we thank you that you never leave us or forsake us. In the darkest times you are there. Thank you that your Presence can drive out fear and help us to take the next step on our journey. We ask that we know this truth today, not just in our heads, but deep within us. We pray today for the families and friends of those that have lost their lives to Coronavirus, and to all who have been bereaved at this time when we can’t visit or put a comforting arm around a shoulder. We ask Lord, for particular comfort from you, the God of all comfort’ at this time. In Jesus Name. Amen*

*Sarah Pix, Team Rector, Hampreston Benefice*

