

Perhaps you have heard or spoken the venerable proverb: *all politics is local*. I get that. Politics, at its best, is the art of the possible: not just any possibility, mind you, but finding a way to get good things done for the people you represent. And, hopefully, for an even wider circle.

Here is a corollary to that proverb: *all theology is personal*. It is one thing to headtrip down any number of rabbit holes that speculative theology can take us on. But what happens, as one of my preaching mentors insisted through an ad slogan of that time, *when the rubber meets the road*. That is, when catechism answers and Sunday School lessons and polite churchy talk confront children mowed down in a school shooting. Or a friend's diagnosis of terminal brain cancer. Or footsteps felt in the night of your own approaching mortality. Where, WHAT, is God then?

All theology is personal. I am reminded of that, time and time again, by any number of Bible passages – but especially, Psalm 23. Its familiarity and repeated hearing over the years may at times dull its remarkable assertions. To be sure, we like hearing about green pastures and still waters. And who doesn't want to sit in front of a bountiful table?

But those are not the only things, the only personal experiences, this psalm includes. There is a valley deep in shadows – and I leave it to you to name those shadows you have faced, or face now, that makes this psalm about you. There are the adversaries that stand or sit across from us, the ones who seem to thrive and succeed in spite of lies or lack of compassion or – again, whatever, and whoever, you experience this way in this moment.

The thing is, the psalm doesn't say only the good things in our lives are real and the bad things (and ones) are illusion. Nor does it say the vice-versa of that. No, all the psalm truly affirms is: God's steady and trust-worthy presence *in it all*. . . and as the psalm ends, *beyond it all*. Or, to put it in the closing words of "A New Creed" of the United Church of Canada:

In life, in death, in life beyond death,

God is with us.

We are not alone.

Thanks be to God.

For Reflection and Action:

What specific times in your life does this psalm evoke memories; questions; hopes?

How does this psalm strike you in this moment of your life?

In what ways might the church (or we) embody such shepherding in these times?