

OUT OF THE FOREST

Adapted from a talk by the Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss, Sr.

Lessons: Psalm 23; Psalm 139:1-12; *Apocalypse Explained* 1174:2

I want to tell you a story that is like the Twenty-third Psalm.

Once upon a time there was a family who lived on a hill in a very beautiful part of the world. There was a dad and a mom and a young boy of about 11 or 12 years old. They were very happy people. Up there in the hills they would often be taken out by the dad to a lovely meadow, where there was grass to play on, and next to the meadow was a beautiful, clear lake where they would lie and feel peaceful after playing. It made the boy so happy to do these things.

Deep down in one of the valleys the boy could see a dark forest. It was large and full of trees. His dad told him he must not play here because it was not a good place. There were dangerous animals, and even bad people in that forest.

But the forest looked great! The trees were large, and they waved in the breeze, and it looked like a special place to explore. He asked his dad about it again, but his dad said it was not a good place to be. It was “the valley of the shadow of death.”

Still, the boy was rather stubborn, and he wanted to explore that forest. He’d go down into the valley and look at it. One day when he did that he saw a sign that said, “Everyone is welcome to come in and enjoy this wonderful forest.” “So,” he thought, “surely there’s nothing wrong with the forest. My dad must be wrong.”

One day he couldn’t resist the temptation to go into the forest. There was a wide path leading in, with leafy vines on each side, and the kinds of trees that it would be exciting to climb. In he went, and it really was as exciting as he had thought it would be. For hours he had fun playing in the forest, but the paths got thinner and thinner, and the trees seemed to cut out the light. At last he got a little frightened and decided he’d leave. Then he found he was really lost. The darkness had come down, he could hear all sorts of animals growling and roaring, and there were angry voices full of threats. He remembered that his dad had said there might be bad people there.

He tried to find his way out but couldn’t, and he was very frightened. Eventually he started crying, and said, “Oh, I wish I had listened to my dad. He knew best. I’d give anything to have him here to help me.”

Family Talk

Well, the fact is that his dad had seen him going into the forest. His dad thought to himself, "I need to let him learn for himself that this forest is not a good place to be. But I'll follow him quietly and make sure he doesn't get into any real trouble. I won't help him unless he really wants the help."

So, when his son said he wished his dad was there, he heard his dad's voice behind him. "Don't worry, son, I'm here." He was so relieved, and he ran to him and said, "Dad, I wish I had listened to you. Please, do you know how to get out of this horrible forest?"

His dad said, "Yes, I do. Take my hand and I'll lead you." But the son was amazed because time and again, when it seemed that there was no path his dad would push some branches aside, and there was a little path. And sometimes when a big path was ahead of them his dad would say, "No, don't go that way, go down this tiny path." The boy would say, "Are you sure this is the right way, dad?" And his dad would say, "I'm the only one who knows the way out of this forest. Trust me."

And sure enough they came close to the edge of the forest. The boy was very hungry by this time, and his dad said, "I brought some food for you. We'll eat here. Don't worry about the animals or the bad people. They can't hurt you as long as I am here." So, they ate, and went on, and came out of the forest, and he could see their home, high on that lovely hill. The boy was so grateful, and his dad led him by the hand all the way home.

Well, that's the story of the Twenty-third Psalm, isn't it? Because the Lord does give us wonderful pastures to live in. Lovely places to be. He is our Father and looks for us. And He offers us all the things we could need.

But sometimes we look at the valley of the shadow of death and we want to choose to do something that He said, "Don't do that!" And we get ourselves into trouble. And sometimes when we have done something wrong, we don't know how to stop doing it. We don't know how to get out of trouble. And often, that's when we say "Oh, I wish the Lord could help me."

But you see, the Lord is our Shepherd. He is there with us every single minute. No matter where we were are. There is one place in the Word where it says, "If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there." The Lord is right there and He's ready to take our hand and to lead us from wherever we've gone, because He loves us so much.

So, if you find yourself being tempted to do things that are not right. And you think, "Oh, the Lord is mad at me." No, He's not. He is right there with you. "Well, that wasn't a good idea. Let Me help you to stop." And if we trust in Him, He will look after us.

Family Talk

The Psalm said, “If I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. For You are with me.” So always remember children, the Lord is with you and only He—only He--knows exactly how to Lead out of your problems towards heaven. Amen.

Amen.