

Introduction: I think these words from our hymnal must be some of the most comforting for us as we come out of a pandemic and grieve the loss of neighbors, friends and loved ones. They are from hymn # 426 in the Red Trinity Hymnal, written by Edward Bickersteth:

*“Till He come”! O let the words
Linger on the trembling chords,
Let the little while between
In their golden light be seen;
Let us think how Heaven and home
Lie beyond that, Till He come.*

*When the weary ones we love
Enter on their rest above,
Seems the earth so poor and vast,
All our life joy overcast?
Hush, be every murmur dumb;
It is only, Till He come.*

*Clouds and conflicts round us press;
Would we have one sorrow less?
All the sharpness of the cross,
All that tells the world is lost,
Death and darkness, and the tomb,
Only whisper, Till He come.*

*See, the feast of love is spread,
Drink the wine, and break the bread;
Sweet memorials, till the Lord
Calls us round His heavenly board;
Some from earth, from glory some
Severed only, Till He come.*

As we seek comfort from “our Great Shepherd of the Sheep” during this time of loss, we find abundant Bible passages to do with the Lord’s “Shepherding care” for us at just such a time as this. We can never spend too much time meditating on God’s Shepherding care among us. Let us remind ourselves, therefore, in this week’s Bible notes of some of the “Shepherding” passages which ought to be first on our list of Scriptures to remember when we are grieving.

Monday: read Genesis 48:15-16 and Psalm 23:1-4. We begin with Jacob’s prayer of blessing upon his long-lost grandsons, Ephraim and Manasseh, born to Joseph in Egypt. Jacob had never thought to see Joseph, let alone his sons, again! But my, how long God’s “rod and staff” prove to be – reuniting Jacob’s covenant family after the old man had given up all hope! This is what it means to have the comfort of Psalm 23’s “rod and staff”! Even in the farthest valley of affliction, suffering and death, God can reunite covenant loved ones under His grace, even though sin has cast them to the four corners of the earth!

Meditate and Pray: Give Jesus the thankfulness of your hearts as you celebrate His ever-faithful leading with hymn # 599 in our Trinity Hymnal:

*Savior, like a shepherd lead us, much we need Thy tender care;
In Thy pleasant pastures feed us, for our use Thy folds prepare.
Blessèd Jesus, blessèd Jesus! Thou hast bought us, Thine we are.
Blessèd Jesus, blessèd Jesus! Thou hast bought us, Thine we are.*

*We are Thine, Thou dost befriend us, be the guardian of our way;
Keep Thy flock, from sin defend us, seek us when we go astray.
Blessèd Jesus, blessèd Jesus! Hear, O hear us when we pray.
Blessèd Jesus, blessèd Jesus! Hear, O hear us when we pray.*

Tuesday: read Genesis 48:15-16. The first thing to notice as we take a closer look at Jacob’s words of blessing is that Joseph is identified as the recipient of the blessing in Gen. 48:15 although Jacob’s hands are actually placed on the heads of Joseph’s children! By this we learn that Jacob’s prayers for his lost son are indeed answered in the end. Not one of the needful words of blessing did God forget in Joseph’s life. Though Rachel died without seeing all she hoped for in her eldest son, and though Jacob spent most of his life never expecting to see Joseph again (Gen. 48:11), God remembered Joseph just as He had remembered Rachel when Joseph was

born in Gen. 30:22! Even though Joseph was torn from home and left for dead by his brothers in Gen. 37:31-33, God the Faithful Shepherd never lost sight of Joseph His wandering sheep!

Meditate and Pray: Lord, thank you for your watch-care, and thank you that you are so far-sighted that we can never be lost from your view. Thank you that for you to see us is for you to help us; for you to hear us is for you to answer us, and that there is no trial too deep for the long arm of your Salvation. Amen.

Wednesday: read Genesis read Genesis 48:15-16. Just because it is Joseph's name which is used in blessing does not mean that God or Jacob ignore the needs of Joseph's children, Ephraim and Manasseh. For the blessing which Jacob invokes on his grandsons is that "they be called by the names of my fathers." In other words, Jacob desires that God would lay claim to these sons of Joseph just as He had laid claim to Abraham – changing his name from "Abram" and changing the entire direction of his life. In short, Jacob wants his grandsons to experience the upheaval of God's claim on their lives, just as Abraham had his life turned upside down when God changed his name!

Meditate and Pray: May God help us to bravely desire that our children and grandchildren share in all that it means to be named by God. Just as Jacob lays his hands on Ephraim and Manasseh, may the Lord lay His hands on our covenant families and claim us by name! After all, is this not what Jesus the "Good Shepherd" does? Does He not know us by name?

Thursday: read Genesis 48:15-16 and John 10:1-5. Jacob was far from the perfect sheep as he wandered through marital troubles, fraternal hatred among his sons and days of running from his brother Esau. Yet the Lord never lost sight of Jacob. And, in the end, when God gave Jacob the command to leave everything behind and go to Egypt in Gen. 46:1-6, Jacob knew his master's voice and followed. Is this not just what our Lord Jesus does in our lives? Jesus describes His care for His sheep in exactly these words when He says in John 10:4: "I go on ahead of them, and my sheep follow me because they know my voice."

Meditate and Pray: On behalf of our whole Covenant Church family, ask the Lord to constantly lead each of us, "all our lives to this very day" (Gen. 48:15). May He come to us constantly as He came to Jacob (whose "sheep legs" must have been wobbling with fear on the border of Egypt) with these words of reassurance from Genesis 46:2-4: "Jacob, Jacob... I am God... Do not be afraid... I will go down with you, and I will surely bring you back again." That's a Good Shepherd!

Friday: read Genesis 48:15-16 and 28:20-21. The blessing of God's safely guiding Jacob "all of his life," day by day and step by step down to Egypt, must not be taken lightly. Jacob vowed in Gen. 28:21 that if God ensured his safe return... then the Lord would be his God. What Jacob had asked for is now fulfilled as he sits in safety, able to pour out God's blessings on his grandsons. Encouraged by God's proximity even in a foreign land, Jacob is not afraid to utter God's Name boldly, thereby sanctifying even the pagan ground of Egypt as his holy place of worship. Why, we could even say that in blessing Joseph and his offspring, Jacob has more authority than even Joseph the Prince of Egypt!

The lesson learned by Jacob is that now he knew more than ever that God was indeed His own God, upon whose Name he could freely call. In the same way, what are all the blessings of Divine watch-care and safety designed to produce in us, if not a life-time desire to 'call upon God's Name': wherever we are and whatever we face? What a discovery Jacob has made! He can now 'lift up the Name of God' himself, "even in a foreign land"!

Meditate and Pray: Lord, please place within each of us, especially when we are first out on our own in college and the working world, the habit of calling upon your Name. Please give us the sense of safety which comes from taking refuge in that Name and all it stands for.

May we like Jacob make the discovery each and every day of the great Power and Grace of that Name, as William Cowper's hymn # 377 teaches us:

*Jesus, where'er Thy people meet,
There they behold Thy mercy seat;
Where'er they seek Thee Thou art found,
And every place is hallowed ground.*

*For Thou, within no walls confined,
Inhabitest the humble mind;
Such ever bring Thee, where they come,
And, going, take Thee to their home.*

*Here may we prove the power of prayer
To strengthen faith and sweeten care;
To teach our faint desires to rise,
And bring all Heav'n before our eyes.*

*Lord, we are few, but Thou art near;
Nor short Thine arm, nor deaf Thine ear;
O rend the heavens, come quickly down,
And make a thousand hearts Thine own!*