

The Good Shepherd

Bishop Greg Thompson

The Lord is my Shepherd Psalm 23/John 10

Kriol translation of Psalm 23 and then back-translated into English.

Psalm 23 – Saam 23.

Yawei, yu jis laik det brabli gudwan stakmen. Yu oldie maindimbat mi, en ai garram ebrijing brom yu. Ai kaan wandim mowa.

Yahweh, you just like that good stockman who's everyday thinking about me, and I get everything from you. I can't want more.

Yu lukaftumbat mi jis laik det stakmen weya im deigim im ship olabat blanga abum spel langa kwaitwan pleis garram bigmob gras en springwoda.

You look after me just like that stockman who takes his sheep to have a break in a quiet place with lots of grass and spring water.

Ebridei yu meigim mi jidan strongbala. Yu shoum mi det raitwei blanga bulurum, dumaji ai trastim yu neim blanga dum wanim yubin pramis.

Everyday you make me strong. You show me the right way to follow. I can trust in your name because you do what you promise.

Nomeda if ai go thru langa brabli dakbala pleis weya enijing gin meigim mi dai, bat stil ai kaan bradin dumaji yu iya garram mi olataim. Yu garram yu spiya en yu longwan stik blanga lukaftumbat mi.

No matter if I go through a really dark place where things can make me die. But still I can't be frightened because you're here with me all the time. You've got your spear and long stick with you to look after me.

Yu meigm det padi redibala blanga mi, weya main enami olabat garra luk yu welkam mi en meigim mi jidan haibala, en yu filimap main kap til im randan.

You make a party ready for me where my enemies have to watch you welcome me and sit me in the highest place and fill my cup til it runs down.

Ai sabi yu na oldie gudbala langa mi, en yu laigim mi brabliwei ebridei weya mi jidan laibala. En ai sabi ai garra jidan langa yu haus garram yu olagijawan.

I know you want good things for me and you'll love me like that everyday I'm alive. And I know I'm going to live in your house with you forever.

Sermon.

As a prayer, the Psalm helps us to consider the elements of our spiritual life. A Prayer that could motivate us to be walking with Jesus as our shepherd. A prayer that attends to the challenges of our lives and the invitation to trust God.

We have used the Kriol translation – a language spoken by over 50,000 speakers in Northern Australian. The youngest language in the world as it emerged in the 20th century in Arnhem land NT flowing from the dispossession of Aboriginal people from their land. Kriol is the first Aboriginal language that has been used to translate the complete Bible in 2006 and it took over 50 years.

I wish to reflect on both the Aboriginal text and the back

translation so that we may have some new perspectives within this beautiful passage. As well as gain insight in how we may read the text in our context, especially as we mark ANZAC day.

The Psalm echoes the sacred memory of God loving, calling and leading his people as the Shepherd/stockman. – it recalls all the history of God leading Moses and God's people out of slavery, through the wilderness and into the promised. Once they were no people, now they were God's people. God had been a shepherd to them. Jesus draws on this wonderful loving image in John 10 I am the good shepherd. The devotion, care and sacrifice of the shepherd is an intimate picture.

Kriol translators draw on the experience of their country and of the many language groups of Australian indigenous people as well as the influence of early settlers language. There are no sheep or shepherds in Arnhem land ,so they translated the Ps 23 this way ;

Yawei, yu jis laik det brabli gudwan stakmen. Yu oldie maindimbat mi, en ai garram ebrijing brom yu. Ai kaan wandim mowa.

Yahweh, you just like that good stockman who's everyday thinking about me, and I get everything from you. I can't want more.

Yu lukaftumbat mi jis laik det stakmen weya im deigim im ship olabat blanga abum spel langa kwaitwan pleis garram bigmob gras en springwoda.

You look after me just like that stockman who takes his sheep to have a break in a quiet place with lots of grass and spring water.

We have an invitation through this prayer to ask God to walk with us as the shepherd stockman. The Kriol translation assists us in seeing the three places that the Good Shepherd walks with us 'at the billabong (kwaitwan pleis)– along the

track (in the darkbala pleis)- with the feast (haibala plais)'.

Kwaitwan pleis. repeated in the psalms as refuge. The place of retreat and renewal. The place where we may focus on the spirit and meaning for our lives. In the Top End it is the place for food and nourishment. We need to make space and time for such a place. Setting aside space in our church or in our homes or in our work place to pray. We see this in the pattern of Jesus. And we see this through the trauma of war.

The Top End was a battlefield from the air during WW2. After the regular bombing far and wide across the north over 250,000 troops were stationed to provide support to the islands north and to prepare for invasion.

Among the military personnel were the 31 Squadron Beaufighters based 110 km south of Darwin at Coomalie creek. The runway is still there with a number of buildings rebuilt in commemoration of the bravery and trials of this squadron.

I have led Anglican services there in the rebuilt open-sided Chapel following the original design. The original chapel was built and paid for during the war from the 31 Squadron. I had recounted to me that the squadron had raised money for a mess but because of the attacks by Japanese bombers and the danger they faced in each mission, they gave it to the Padre to erect a chapel. ANZAC Day reminds us of the need for personal and community sanctuary while we face either danger or despair.

The Psalm moves from kwaitwan pleis to darkbala pleis.

Ebridei yu meigim mi jidan strongbala. Yu shoum mi det raitwei blanga bulurrum, dumaji ai trastim yu neim blanga dum wanim yubin pramis.

Everyday you make me strong. You show me the right way to follow. I can trust in your name because you do what you promise.

Nomeda if ai go thru langa brabli dakbala pleis weya enijing gin meigim mi dai, bat stil ai kaan bradin dumaji yu iya garram mi olataim. Yu garram yu spiya en yu longwan stik blanga lukaftumbat mi.

No matter if I go through a really dark place where things can make me die. But still I can't be frightened because you're here with me all the time. You've got your spear and long stick with you to look after me.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; your rod and your staff – they comfort me.

The shepherd stockman leads us on a track through a valley. We need the sanctuary and refuge of the spirit, and we need the track for walking with God.

In the New Testament, God sends Jesus to walk with us and to show us how to walk with God. Walking with Jesus was the school of faith. Unlike his rabbinical peers, his classroom for disciples is on the road – learning by listening, doing, reflecting and experiencing both rejection and welcome.

Our missional journey as Anglicans and your personal journey are bound up with the great journey of Jesus. And we have a history of walking through the darkbala pleis In 1908 in response to the atrocities heard during an Anglican conference in Melbourne, Bishops commissioned ABM and CMS to send a ship and a team to the Gulf. Aboriginal Christians James and Angelina Noble and Horace Reid arrived at Roper and were sent out to contact the scattered Aboriginal tribes. One of the translators of the Kriol NT was Rev Dr Joy Sandefur who pointed out to me a gorge in the hills where men would lie in wait to kill Aboriginal people as they made their way to the Roper Mission in the 1900's. She said local elders were still calling it the 'darkbaka pleis' in the 1970's.

Barnabas Roberts came into Roper mission as a little boy soon after the sanctuary of Roper Mission was established in 1908.

Like many others, he and his family experienced the horrible times of family being hunted off their country. Like many other families, his was badly affected by leprosy, which claimed his first wife, Norah.

Barnabas held on to the best of his traditions, including helping to preserve the Alawa language. For many years, Barnabas worked as a stockman, and walked with a limp after an accident with a horse. This did not stop him walking long distances to tell people the good news of Jesus, something he did right up until his death. He set the pattern of going out to people in isolated camps and encouraging them to follow the ways of the Lord.

We walk in the company of these Aboriginal saints and we are invited to join the great journey in Christ.

The track through the darkbala pleis is where we learn to trust in God, to grow in faith, to move towards the destiny Christ has won for us.

As the kwaitwan pleis needs the track through the darkbala pleis, so the track leads to the haibala pleis. The place of hospitality and community and of welcome rather than judgement.

Yu meigm det padi redibala blanga mi, weya main enami olabat garra luk yu welkam mi en meigim mi jidan haibala, en yu filimap main kap til im randan.

You make a party ready for me where my enemies have to watch you welcome me and sit me in the highest place and fill my cup til it runs down.

Ai sabi yu na oldie gudbala langa mi, en yu laigim mi brabliwei ebridei weya mi jidan laibala. En ai sabi ai garra jidan langa yu haus garram yu olagijawan.

I know you want good things for me and you'll love me like

that everyday I'm alive. And I know I'm going to live in your house with you forever.

Ps 23 carries a vision of community not only of the individual and the personal bond with God. It is a catholic faith we share in, bigger than the boundaries of our personal faith, affiliations and experiences and it brings us into relationships, often not of our own choosing. It is an open community in his name that transcends culture, language, gender and status – an economy of love where the intimate bond between shepherd and sheep, between Christ and church is reflected in the relationships of a faith community.

Such bonds of love were tested when two policemen were outside St Johns Canberra church as a service proceeded in 1950, and it wasn't for a dignitary that they were there for, but for a preacher. Before the day he preached, there were various groups bitterly opposed to what the church was doing. It was in the newspapers, letters to the Rector and Bishop and a deep concern fell on the congregation. Rallies were held in the local community to oppose the church's action. The Rector had embarked on a public controversy and the local community was divided. The service went ahead.

The Rector was Archdeacon of Canberra the Ven Robert Davies. He had welcomed the Presiding Bishop of the Anglican Church in Japan, Bishop Michael Yashiro – the first Japanese to be granted an Australian visa after the Second World War to preach at St John's at Evensong on Friday, 9 June 1950. In a spirit of contrition and repentance, before his visit to Australia, he had sent several bamboo crosses to churches associated with the martyrs. The Bishop was to go on a pilgrimage to the various parishes in Australia, particularly the home parishes of 'the New Guinea martyrs' – Sister May Hayman was one of those martyrs whose window is in the St John's sanctuary. During the service Padre F. Bashford of Duntroon took part. He was a former prisoner of the Japanese. Several of Sister Hayman's relatives were present. The bishop

dedicated the small bamboo cross bearing in Japanese characters the words 'Reconciliation and Repentance'. This service was a moving occasion with profound significance but many of the community whose members had only too recently personal experience of the horrors of the Second World War found the timing too much. In this setting, it was thought unsafe to leave the little cross in the church and it was put in Davies' care. (from 'Firm Still you Stand' Alf Body). It took more than 41 years to find its place in the church in what has been called the Reconciliation and Repentance Chapel.

*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows*

I think of this bamboo cross story between bitter enemies and of how Christ's love and courage through individuals began a healing journey at the Shepherd's table.

Kwaitwan pleis, the track through the darkbala pleis and the community of the haibala pleis invite us to pray Psalm 23. The Good Shepherd will walk with us and when we are too weak carry us home.