

# LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD'S PSALM 23

## *Psalm 23 [TNIV]*

<sup>1</sup>The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

<sup>2</sup>He makes me lie down in green pastures,

he leads me beside quiet waters,

<sup>3</sup>he refreshes my soul.

He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.

<sup>4</sup>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.

<sup>5</sup>You prepare a table before me

in the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil;

my cup overflows.

<sup>6</sup>Surely your goodness and love will follow me

all the days of my life,

and I will

dwell in

the house

of the

LORD

forever.



## **Psalm 23 [Red Riding Hood]**

The Lord is my Shepherd, so I have everything I need.

I can have picnics with Grandma all the time,

And healthful drinks every day.

In fact, I feel like a new person every day.

The Good Shepherd picks the best and safest paths through the Dark Forest,

So that I have nothing to be afraid about.

Because he chases the Big Bad Wolf away with a big stick,

And when I wander off he catches me back with his staff,

I always feel safe in the Good Shepherd.

Even when the wolf is at the door,

The Good Shepherd provides a wonderful picnic for Grandma and me,

It's like I'm a princess in his castle,

I could never be more joyful.

So, just as the Good Shepherd has looked after me up till now,

I know he will always look after me,

And at the end of it all I will picnic with him forever.

Most of you know the story of Little Red Riding Hood. I reckon some of Red Riding Hood's experiences parallel Psalm 23. Yes, I know, that sounds like a bit of a stretch of the imagination, but bear with me. And it may seem this sermon is a bit of 'fluff' because I'm using a fairy tale, but good stories always have in them good truth.

By the way, the Little Red Riding Hood has versions in many cultures. In China the wolf is a tiger. In Islamic countries Red Riding Hood is a boy.

Anyway, let's get into it:

## LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD [from Grimms' Fairy tales]

Once upon a time, in the middle of a thick forest stood a small cottage, the home of a pretty little girl known to everyone as Little Red Riding Hood. One day, her Mummy waved her goodbye at the garden gate, saying: "Take this basket of cakes to Grandma, but be very careful. Keep to the path through the wood and don't ever stop. That way, you will come to no harm."

Keep to the path through the wood: *He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.*

Sometimes the path we are on can be full of troubles and dangers. And yet <sup>4</sup>*Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.*

On Wednesday at Pastors' Conference we had a whole day on ministering in a time of disaster. And what was most clear to me was that, though churches and agencies do many similar things at a time of disaster, the Church has one thing that government and community agencies can never offer; and that is the Gospel – the gift of God's love even in the midst of flood or earthquake or tsunami or bushfire. For one of the things people often ask is "Why?" and even "What did I do wrong?" And in the Gospel we can assure people of God's love for them in Christ – a love that calls out from the cross of Christ, where bore all the world's wrong.

Full of good intentions, the little girl made her way through the wood, but she was soon to forget her mother's wise words.

The wood became thicker and thicker. Suddenly a yellow butterfly fluttered down through the trees. Little Red Riding Hood started to chase the butterfly.

"I'll catch you! I'll catch you!" she called. Suddenly she saw some large daisies in the grass.

"Oh, how sweet!" she exclaimed and, thinking of Grandma, she picked a large bunch of flowers.

We are often bombarded with what is wrong in the world. The Psalmist, and Little Red Riding Hood, remind us that this is God's world, and there is still much to be thankful about, to celebrate and enjoy.

<sup>2</sup> *He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters,*  
<sup>3</sup> *he refreshes my soul.*

Of course, the good things about this world can sometimes be temptations off the right path, which is what happened with Red Riding Hood.

In the meantime, two wicked eyes were spying on her from behind a tree ... a strange rustling in the woods made Little Red Riding Hood's heart thump. Now quite afraid she said to herself. "I must find the path and run away from here!"

The Good Shepherd's staff is useful. Like God's Law, it hooks us

around the neck and brings us back to the Path. *your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*

At last she reached the path again but her heart leapt into her mouth at the sound of a gruff voice which said: "Where are you going, my pretty girl, all alone in the woods?"

"I'm taking Grandma some cakes. She lives at the end of the path," said Little Riding Hood in a faint voice.

"Good. Well, goodbye. Perhaps we'll meet again," replied the wolf. Then he loped away thinking to himself "I'll gobble the grandmother first, then lie in wait for the grandchild!"

This little scene reminds of 1 Peter 5:8: *Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.* [TNIV] But more about this at the end of the story.

Soon after the wolf got to grandma's house, Little Red Riding Hood tapped on the door.

"Grandma, can I come in?" she called.

Now, the wolf had put on the old lady's shawl and cap and slipped into the bed. Trying to imitate Grandma's quavering little voice, he replied: "Open the latch and come in!"

"What a deep voice you have," said the little girl in surprise.

"The better to greet you with," said the wolf.

"Goodness, what big eyes you have."

"The better to see you with."

"And what big hands you have!" exclaimed Little Red Riding Hood, stepping over to the bed.

"The better to hug you with," said the wolf.

"What a big mouth you have," the little girl murmured in a weak voice.

"The better to eat you with!" growled the wolf, and jumping out of bed, he swallowed her up too. Then, with a fat full tummy, he fell fast asleep.

Today we baptise two little girls. And they are given a little blanket, like a red riding hood, as a reminder that they are 'clothed in the righteous robes of Christ'. Martin Luther wrote that we wear Christ's righteousness like a robe, and only our toes might poke out from underneath it. But that's where the devil will attack us – just at the seemingly unsuspecting little things in our lives. Our response is not to lash out by kicking, trying to fight the devil by our own strength and ability, by strong faith and many prayers or whatever. Instead we should snuggle under the robe of Christ, hiding ourselves completely in him, and let the Good Shepherd deal with the big bad wolf called the Devil.

In the meantime, a hunter had emerged from the wood, and on noticing the

cottage, he decided to stop and ask for a drink. But the hunter could hear a strange whistling sound; it seemed to be coming from inside the cottage. He peered through the window ... and saw the large wolf himself, with a fat full tummy, snoring away in Grandma's bed.

Without making a sound, the hunter carefully loaded his gun and gently opened the window. He pointed the barrel straight at the wolf's head and . . . BANG!

"Got you at last!" shouted the hunter in glee. "You'll never frighten anyone again."

Jesus told us his disciples: <sup>18</sup>"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. <sup>19</sup>I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. <sup>20</sup>However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." [Luke 10:18-20, TNIV]

And St Paul wrote: <sup>37</sup>No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup>For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, <sup>39</sup>neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. [Romans 8:37-39, TNIV]

Note how both passages end: the best thing, the most important thing is to be in Christ.

He cut open the wolf's stomach and to his amazement, out popped Grandma and Little Red Riding Hood, safe and unharmed.

"You arrived just in time," murmured the old lady, quite overcome by all the excitement.

<sup>5</sup>*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.*

The Good Shepherd has mighty power with which to fight the devil. But it isn't a gun or an axe!

*your rod and your staff, they*                      Because he chases the Big Bad Wolf  
*comfort me.*    away with a big stick,

The Shepherd's rod, or big stick, is the Gospel; and it terrifies the old Wolf. The Good News is that we are forgiven and have a right relationship with God, not by anything we have done or could do, but simply and only by what Jesus did in his death and resurrection. The Devil tries to attack us by getting at something about us. But that's when we need to hide all the more in Christ, snuggling down under that red riding hood of his love.

"It's safe to go home now," the hunter told Little Red Riding Hood. "The big bad wolf is dead and gone, and there is no danger on the path."

*and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*

Amen.