

Variations on a theme part 1

There are so many different variations of Psalm 23,

There's Howard Goodall's version used as the theme tune for the Vicar of Dibley

<https://youtu.be/yLxdb3ov-zE>

Then there is Stuart Townend's which is becoming well-known in many churches to-day

<https://youtu.be/pN4tPkX0MG0>

And those old stalwarts,

The Lord's my Shepherd, [Scottish psalter 1650]

God of love my shepherd is [George Herbert 1593-1633]

The King of love my Shepherd is [Henry Williams Baker 1821-1877]

are often sung in our services

<https://youtu.be/MwqahDvURsQ>

Then there are references to the psalm in many other hymns – *Father hear the prayer we offer* quotes the psalm in the beginning of the first two verses

Not forever in green pastures

Do we ask our way to be;

Not forever in still waters

would we idly rest and stay

But just as in the past the Psalm attracted poets to write metrical versions to sing as hymns, and so met the needs of their time, the Japanese poet Toki Miyashina reworked Psalm 23 as a Psalm for Busy People to meet the needs of people in a modern city culture.

Psalm 23 for Busy People

The Lord is my pace setter... I shall not rush

He makes me stop for quiet intervals

He provides me with images of stillness which restore my serenity.

He leads me in the way of efficiency through calmness of mind and his guidance is peace.

Even though I have a great many things to accomplish each day, I will not fret, for his presence is here

His timelessness, his all importance will keep me in balance

He prepares refreshment and renewal in the midst of my activity by anointing my mind with his oils of tranquillity

My cup of joyous energy overflows

Truly harmony and effectiveness shall be the fruits of my hours for I shall walk in the Pace of the Lord and dwell in his house for ever.

Toki Miyashina

Anyone with a hectic city job would recognise the busyness of life portrayed and the need for those moments of refreshment that are so essential to cope with the stresses and the strains of their world.

But even in lockdown, with the pace of life so suddenly and forcibly slowed we can all find meaning in his words. In fact, sometimes facing a new interpretation makes us reflect again on the words of both the original and the new and in the contrast find new meaning and refreshment.

Prayer

Lord

Drop thy still dews of quietness,
Till all our strivings cease;
Take from our souls the strain and stress,
And let our ordered lives confess
The beauty of thy peace.

Breathe through the heats our desire
Thy coolness and thy balm;
Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,
O still small voice of calm.

From the hymn Dear Lord and Father of Mankind