Along the track

A Tiny Ripple

Psalm 23 is a beautiful piece of poetry. It is uplifting, encouraging, its imagery speaks to our deepest souls. Fresh and green pastures in the barren wilderness, quiet, refreshing waters, safe paths even in deep, dark valleys. One wonders what were the circumstances that lead to this beautiful psalm being written.

One line stands out, though: 'Surely your goodness and kindness will follow me all the days of my life' - Ps 23 6. Do they? There are some days, sometimes in our lives where we certainly doubt that is happening. We see some people who seem beset by tragedy or really hard times. We might even experience such times ourselves. So it may be hard to believe that God's goodness and kindness are following us, that they are always close by.

In the wilderness quite near to where Psalm 23 was inspired, the Valley of the Shadows (sometimes called the Valley of the Shadow of Death) offers an extraordinary experience. It is located parallel to the Jordan River to the south of Jericho in the Judean Hills. Despite the fearsome Biblical name of the valley, this place is one of the most beautiful locations to be found in the Judean Desert. The jagged rock cliffs carved out of millennia of watercourses offers a very peaceful stillness, a respite from the heat. But it is another feature that makes it memorable. Its echo. Even the quietest voices come back and, in some places, three or four times! As you walk away, you can still hear the sound of your voice reverberating along the valley, even after you have moved on.

Do we ever think about where we find goodness in our lives? Do we find kindness wherever we go? Do we spread goodness, do we show kindness or just take it? Like these echoes, even the smallest acts of goodness, the tiniest acts of kindness follow us, they come back. But do we wait for God's goodness and kindness or are we agents of it. As the prayer of St Francis reminds us, if we want to bring peace, it is in giving that we receive.

The Kingdom of God, Jesus assures us, is about mustard seeds, the smallest seeds that grow into such big trees where birds come and nest and where we find shade. The Kingdom is about small seemingly unimportant things, but which, in the long run, are the big things.

So every time a person reaches out to another, we are agents of the Kingdom. When we seek to improve the lot of others, when we stand up or an ideal or against an unjust situation, no matter how small that may seemingly be, or when we try to improve the lot of others, the mustard seed is growing.

Do we ever think about where we find goodness at work in our lives? It is so easy to take that for granted, to come to expect it, to think we deserve it. We don't. Do you ever think about those who bring kindness into our world or do we simply take them for granted too? During the pandemic lockdown, there were many small acts of kindness that were often noticed – the note in the letter box, the parcel on the doorstep, the phone call to see if everything was okay, just those little acts that broke the boredom and loneliness of the day.

Where does this goodness and kindness come from, why is it so important? Time and again we have heard of dreadful circumstances where evil seems to triumph – the Holocaust, the vicious religious wars of recent times, the upheaval of people from their country and forced to live in dreadful circumstances. But even here there are stories of goodness and kindness, simple stories that uplifted the hearts and minds. Even in these circumstances.

Every time we reach out to others, every time we show gratitude, every time we go out of our way to assist another, every time we work to improve the lives of others, the conditions under which they may live, we make a difference. We help to make goodness and kindness a reality, we send out a ripple of hope and when we join with others we can make this world a better place.

So how do we know? We listen for the echo. Just as in the Valley of Darkness we did not sing or talk or call out just to hear the echo, in life we do not show kindness or generosity to other for the reward. But in one way or another, it comes back.

Regards
Jim Quillinan

Email: jquillinan@dcsi.net.au

Funded and published by Diocese of Sale Catholic Education Limited, for schools in the Diocese.