

At home in God: Psalm 23

Whether we are sheep or people or runaway bunnies, we cannot run away from God.

by [Susan Andrews](#) in the [April 14, 1999](#) issue

When my children were small, the mommy in me always played tug-of-war with the minister in me. Often, while sitting in an evening meeting, I would dream of being home, curled up in bed, reading to my little ones. And reading to the little one in me.

Margaret Wise Brown's *The Runaway Bunny* is a book for children of all ages. It is the story of a little bunny who dreams about running away from home, only to find "home" wherever he ends up. His mommy does not stop him from running away, but she does not leave him either. When he climbs a tree, the tree is in the shape of Mommy. When he travels the ocean, the wind is in the shape of Mommy. When he joins the circus, the trapeze artist is shaped like Mommy. Finally, Bunny gets the point. "Aw, shucks!" he says, "I might just as well stay home and be your little bunny." Which he does.

Whether we are bunnies or sheep or people, we cannot run away from God. God is our home, and like the early ark of the Israelites, God travels with us wherever we go. The apostle Paul reminds us that "nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord . . . neither death nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation."

The Fourth Sunday in Easter offers us several images of God as home. God is both shepherd and host, pasture and valley, mansion and fortress, still water and open gate. Whatever the circumstances of our lives, God is with us--in peace, in war, in hope, in fear, in life, in death, in joy, in suffering. When we are at home with God, even the most difficult days are infused with abundant life.

Twenty-five years ago, St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington, D.C., was a federal facility with more than 4,000 psychiatric patients, most of them poor and black. As a

chaplain intern I was assigned to the cancer ward, where certain death added an extra layer to the human despair. One day I entered an isolation unit to find a wretched shell of a human being--legs and arms chewed up by gangrene, sweat pouring out of a shaking, stinking body. "Dear God," I thought, "what can I possibly say to this man?"

The answer came intuitively. The words of the Lord's Prayer and the Twenty-third Psalm suddenly welled up within me. As the familiar cadence filled that putrid room, the creature before me changed. He stopped shaking. He looked into my eyes and began to speak the words with me. In that moment, he traveled back home, back into the rooms of a long-lost faith. When this child of the covenant died an hour later, he had been welcomed by a loving God who had never left him.

In life and in death, we belong to God. In life and in death, we are at home in God. But the reverse is also true. God needs and wants to be at home in us. God needs and wants to abide in us.

Author Joyce Rupp recounts an Ethiopian legend about a shepherd boy named Alemayu. One night he was stranded on a frozen mountain, clothed only in a thin wrap. When he arrived back home, the villagers were amazed that he had survived so well. When asked to explain he said, "The night was bitter. When all the sky was dark, I thought I would die. Then far, far off I saw a shepherd's fire on another mountain. I kept my eyes on the red glow in the distance, and I dreamed of being warm. And that is how I had the strength to survive." Hope is the home within us, the home where God lives, the home where God abides.

Rest, restoration and security are the promises of scripture. And they are promised even and especially in the midst of enmity and danger and death. But such blessed assurance comes with a price. We come to trust a dependable God only when we embrace a dependable discipline. In Acts we learn that the Pentecost church grew through devotion and discipline. Day by day the new converts spent time together in the temple. Day by day they broke bread at home, and ate with glad and generous hearts. Day by day they praised God, sold their possessions and distributed the proceeds according to need. And day by day, God added to their number, and added abundantly to their already abundant life. Like any home, God needs care and attention and honor. But once we have restored and been restored at home we can then go forth to give care and attention and honor to the world.

In the spiritual world, none of us is ever homeless. Each day we wake up as residents in the homeland of God. In these words from her poem "Awakening," Gunilla Norris offers us a daybreak prayer:

First thought--as in "first light"--
let me be aware that I waken *in* You.
Before I even think that I am in my bed
let me think that I am *in* You.

Each hour wake me further to find You.
Let me relish in You, exult in You,
play in You, be faithful in You.
Let me be wholly present
to living the gift of time.