

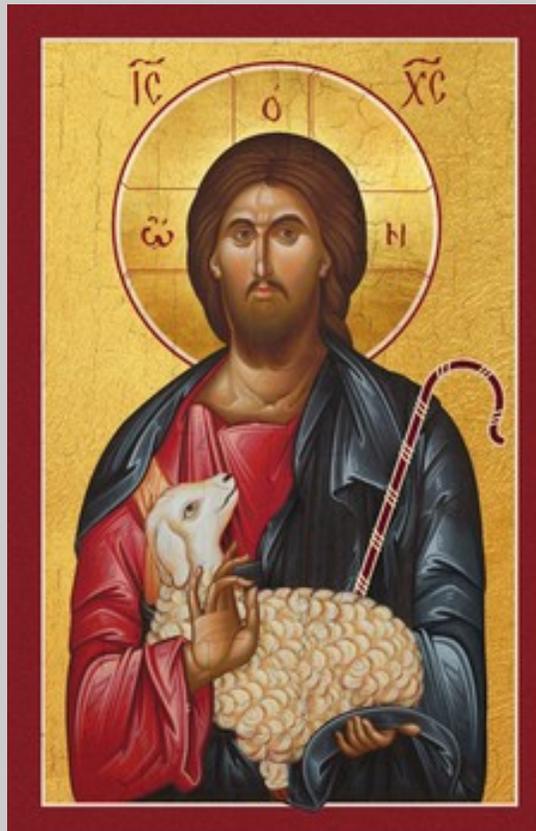
Tending Ancient Paths

The Paradigms, Posture, and Practices of Jesus

‘...You are with me...’

Are you with me? I have used that phrase often to ‘check in’ with those I am sharing with to confirm that they are ‘following’ the current thoughts I am sharing. Yet, I wonder how many times my use of that phrase reveals more about me? My need to be assured that what I am sharing is worth their attention. I mean, am I actually inviting people into a communal process of thought or am I simply trying to alleviate my own unspoken fear - that I am actually alone in what I am sharing - ouch! Not one of us enjoys the kind of aloneness that leaves us defenseless to our fears of safety, security, or belonging. The scriptures proclaim a God who meets us in those places, in fact, the Psalmist says ‘even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, You are with me’.

You are with me, is the game changer of all game changers! I awoke this past week, a couple days after the war in the middle east had broken out again, with a foreboding, almost tangible, funk. I could not recall my dreams but what was in my body and on my spirit was a kind of heaviness. Beloved this is what happens when our minds and bodies begin to imagine a future where we find ourselves without the resources we think we need. We are allowing our mind, our heart, and our body to imagine a future where we are alone - without God. After grabbing a coffee I headed to my office with some sense that I was dealing with the effects of the tragic news of the weekend - so I set myself to my regular morning prayer liturgy (when you don’t know what to say - say your prayers, that is a phrase worth remembering). My daily liturgy begins with confession and moves into praying the 23rd Psalm. On this day I picked up my Common Book of Prayer and began to read the 23rd Psalm and was arrested by the transition of verse 4— the place where the Psalmist moves from a third person description of the Lord as his Shepherd, even in the worst he could imagine- *the valley of the shadow of death*, into a first person declaration... **‘You are with me’**. As I paced in my office I paused and then pulled out my journal and began to write these words ‘How much is fear a failure of imagination, anchored in a sense of lack, that allows our mind and body to be captured by the idea of a future absent of God?’ Absent of a Good Shepherd? When we allow ourselves to camp out in this place we are unable to see ‘Who’ is present and what is possible. But the truth remains the same - *‘You are with me’*. **You**, whose Presence is able to refresh, restore, reverse, repel, and return me to a place of wholeness and rest. As I looked at this phrase in verse 4, I opened my computer and began to explore these words in the original language. In just a short time I discovered why some rabbinic teachers consider this phrase to be the most precious and profound phrase in all of the Psalms: ‘Ki Atah imadi’ - **‘You are with me’**. Here are just a few of the phrases and definitions:



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And the secret is simply this: **Christ in you!**

Yes, Christ in you bringing with him the hope of all glorious things to come. Col 1:27b, JB Phillips

- **'You are with me'** = **Sustaining**, Imadi. In **Hebrew** **this** is not just a reference to an identity but to the essence of the whole individual personally present to sustain because 'imadi' means that person's primary concern is to protect and care for, they are alert and ready to act.
- **'You are with me'** = **Support**, Imadi. The root of this Hebrew word comes from both the Akkadian and Persian languages, the **Akkadian** carries the idea of a wounded warrior leaning against something or someone to support them. A comrade to keep them standing and in some cases to keep them from falling.
- **'You are with me'** = **Settled**, Imadi. The root in the **Persian** language reveals a person who is persistent in maintaining the value of something. Jesus told the story of the pearl of great price - the dirt, the obscurity, the lostness of the pearl did not change its value. **Imadi - the person watching knows the value of what He is supporting and protecting!**

Ki Atah Imadi - 'You are with me' means the essence of His whole being is in active present tense-sustaining and supporting what He knows to be of great worth.

The Lord is my Shepherd I shall not be in want - You (that Shepherd) are WITH me! The opposite of that reality is not just fear but the surrendering of our souls to the shadows of loneliness that leads us to disconnection. We are surrounded by forces that financially benefit from soul-less activity and we also have no lack of options that invite us towards consumption and conformity. These options do not touch our deepest need for communion - the place where we know we are loved, valued, seen, and known. Perhaps, said another way, we can often give attention and affection to things that leave our soul disconnected leading us to live with a sense of a foreboding shadow...of lack, insecurity, and isolation. **You are with me!** Could it be? The good shepherd who leads us to places of wholeness -who restores and revives EVEN in the valley of deepest and darkest shadows - Could it be?—**You are with me!**

Truth be told its not that hard to imagine a future of lack that can lead our hearts to want to surrender to the shadows of fear. Its not insignificant that it was here that the Psalmist makes this proclamation in the first person - "**You are with me**". Our triune God is a good shepherd who knows how to keep us standing and how to present us with great joy. Perhaps our greatest need is not to attempt to talk ourselves out of fear but rather to surrender to what is true - **You are with me** - no matter what. **You**, who have never distanced yourself from me- **You**, who can keep me from falling- **You**, who knows the value of what you are supporting and watching over. **You, are with me!** Even when we don't believe we have value, that we are lost and hidden, dirty and buried in despair...He that is near knows the value of what He protects! This is the essence of hope, the anchor that holds us as we ride the waves of tumultuous times. This is Good News!

Ki Atah Imadi - one last nugget about this phrase from one Hebrew teacher is that it is written in future perfect tense - meaning, it is *an action that has already occurred - yet it hasn't*. Beloved this is Gospel! The Lord has not only been with us, **'He is present with us and will forever always be with us'** —**Selah!**

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