

## **The Indian Version of the Twenty Third Psalm**

### **Psalm 23 NIV**

**The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.**

**4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley,<sup>[a]</sup> I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.**

**6 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.**

On this 2021 Hillsboro History Alive weekend, there has been a special recognition of the Abenaki Indian Tribe. Yesterday, at the History Alive event here in our town, there were demonstrations of Abenaki drums, their uses of native plants and stories about their history and a trail project.

In recognition of the Abenaki Indian tribe, I would like to speak about is the Indian Version of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm and Alan Whitney will read for us.

### **Indian Version of Psalm 23**

**The Great Father above is a Shepherd Chief. I am His and with Him I want not. He throws out to me a rope and the name of the rope is love and He draws me to where the grass is green and the water is not dangerous. I eat and lie down and satisfied. Sometimes my heart is very weak and falls down, but He lifts me up again and draws me into a good road.**

**His name is wonderful. Sometime, it may be very soon, it may be a long, long time. He will draw me into a valley. It is dark there, but I'll be afraid not, for it is in between those mountains that the Shepherd Christ will meet me. And the hunger that I have in my heart all through this life will be satisfied. He gives me a staff to lean upon. He spreads a table before me with all kinds of foods. He puts His hand upon my head and all the "tired" is gone. My cup He fills till it runs over. What I tell is true. I lie not. These roads that are "away ahead" will stay with me through this life and after: and afterwards I will go to live in the great house and sit down with the Shepherd Chief forever.**

A person in our congregation who is a member of the Abenaki tribe assisted me with the different verses when I preached this.

**Verse 1. The Great Father above, A Shepherd Chief is. I am His and with Him I want not.** The Abenaki's believed in God and where he was called "The Owner". He was the one who created people, animals, and all natural things.

The Great Father above is our creator and provides for all of our needs. Although we cannot see Him, He knows exactly what we need. As a heavenly parent who watches His children, our Great Father above does what is best for us.

**V2. He throws out to me a rope and the name of the rope is love.**

Ropes were important in the Abenaki village. With them, they made belts which held up their breechcloths with leather leggings and backpacks. With their special type of wigwams which were cone shaped and covered with bark. The lashed ropes held the poles together.

Now when you think of it, a rope is a connection that offers help or a lifeline. Throughout life, we may not know what direction we should go in, but when our Great Father above figuratively gives us a rope, we should accept it and hold on.

There will be times when we will need assistance and that rope may come in the form of a friend, a family member, a doctor, a police officer, a school teacher. But whatever form it comes in, recognize that it came from the Great Father from above. He is there to help.

**Verse 2b. He draws me to where the grass is green and water is not dangerous and I eat and lie down and am satisfied.**

The Abenaki's had their small family bands near the water and where there was plenty of grass for their animals. It was here they held their dances, their religious ceremonies, their festivals and feasts, their POW wows and games. It was a place of good memories and peace for all.

Sometimes as we go through trying times, God will bring us to the place of rest. And all of us need periods of refreshment. If we don't get it, we become stressed. But when we have the peace of God in our hearts, we will endure.

**Verse 3. Sometimes my heart is very weak and falls down, but He lifts me up again and draws me into a good road. His name is Wonderful.**

The Abenaki leaders taught their people to be courageous and early in their history, they did fight in a number of wars. Though they lived outdoors their lifestyle exposed them to many dangers. But if they put their trust in the Great Father above, He would see them through.

All of us have our times of sadness, discouragement, loneliness and despair. But no matter who we are or our nationality, we need to hold on to the rope and allow our Heavenly Father to restore us.

**Verse 3b. Sometime it may be very soon, it may be a long, long time. He will draw me into the valley. It is dark there, but I'll be afraid not, for it is in between those mountains that the Shepherd Christ will meet me and the hunger I have in my heart and all through this life will be satisfied.**

The Abenaki lived off the land and they were exposed to the dangers of wild animals and the cold New Hampshire weather. Because the Shepherd Christ was with them, they were not afraid.

This reminds me of the hymn. What a Friend we Have in Jesus. All our sins and griefs to bear. What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer.

Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere? We should never be discouraged, take it to the Lord in prayer. Can we find a friend so faithful who will all our sorrows share? Jesus knows our every weakness; take it to the Lord in prayer.

**V4. He gives me a staff to lean on.**

The Chief, the Sachem or the head of the family was the one in who carried a staff and that was symbolic of his leadership and authority. This past week I looked at a photograph of Chief Don Stevens and he carried two staffs.

Sometimes in councils, the staff would be used as a talking stick where it would be passed around and the person held it, it was their turn to speak. I have seen this used in church meetings,

where a small wooden cross was passed around for the same purpose.

The important part of a staff is that it is symbolic of leadership, but regardless of what role or position we hold, may we use it wisely and give glory to God.

**V5 He spread a table before me with all kinds of foods. He put His hand upon my head and all the "tired is gone. My cup He fill till it runs over.**

In every culture food is very important. It is no different with the Abenaki tribe. Though they did not have access to dairy products or white sugar, they used maple syrup and honey as sweeteners. I think the Abenaki's ate quite well with cornmeal, stew, hazelnut cake, wild rice, salmon burgers, maple syrup pie, all kinds of vegetables, wild game and seafood.

But to set a table and provide a meal for others is a gesture of hospitality. At the Pow Wow, everyone is fed and no one goes away hungry.

Though the Lord gives good things to us, he always has our best interest at hand. When we place our lives into his care, the stress or the tired will diminish.

**V6 What I tell is true. I lie not. These roads that are away ahead will stay with me through this life and afterwards. I will go to live in the Big Tepee and sit down with the Shepherd chief forever.**

Native Americans to include the Abenaki were taught as they lived out their life, they could never get it back. There was an unwritten rule in the tribe. Everyone was expected to be truthful.

In many Native American villages, the chief's tepee or wigwam would be in the center. If a person wanted to talk to the chief,

they could not go in unannounced. They had to make a special request. Once inside they wouldn't talk directly to the chief, but to a person called the crier and the crier would speak to the Chief or Sachem.

I do see an interesting parallel that Jesus is like the "crier" who speaks to God on our behalf.

Let me close:

The great Father above-a Shepherd Chief, **that is relationship.**

He throws out to me a rope, **that is supply.**

He draws me to where the grass is green, **that is refreshment.**

He will draw me into the valley, **that is guidance.**

It is dark there, but I will not be afraid, **that is protection.**

Between the mountains, the Shepherd Chief will meet me, **that is faithfulness.**

He gives me a staff to lean on, **that is authority.**

He spreads a table before me with all kinds of food, **that is hope.**

My cup He fills till it runs over, **that is abundance.**

I will go to live in the Big Tepee and sit down with the Shepherd Chief, **that is security.**

Forever, **that is eternity.**