

## **Psalm 123**

### **Text:**

**As the eyes of a manservant look to the hand of his master, or the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the hand of our God, until he has mercy on us.**



### **Thought: Monty's Treat**

**Waiting on God is what Advent is all about — watching and waiting. And Psalm 123 captures that beautifully with its arresting image of the perfect manservant or lady's maid, focussed attentively on the hand of their master or mistress. An image from a different world — but it's not too difficult to translate it into something more familiar. The children's choir I saw in Huddersfield Town Hall on Friday night, intently watching the hands of their teacher and responding with such alacrity to her every signal. Those ball-boys and ball-girls at Wimbledon, totally focussed on watching the ball and choosing the right moment to run out and collect it. Or Monty**

the dog — indeed it seems nearly every dog I meet on my walks these days — with his eyes fixed on my hand (anybody's hand) that might be moving towards a pocket that just might contain a Treat. Oh joy! Oh rapture!

Advent invites us to wait on God with that kind of alertness, that kind of focus. But there are different kinds of watching and waiting. Monty's (I have to say) is pretty basic. Where's my treat? I've done my bit — I've done what they wanted (well, I only barked twice at that stupid dog) — so where is it? Sometimes our attitude to prayer is a bit like that. I've done my bit — I've been a good boy — so where's my reward?

But Psalm 123 describes a relationship with rather more depth to it. Not a relationship based on treats, but something deeper and more precious. An invitation to a shared endeavour, a relationship built on mutual trust — an invitation to join with God in the creation of a just and merciful world. More like a shepherd's relationship with his working dogs: what James Rebanks calls 'finding that thread of connection, finding that understanding, trust and belief in each other': 'This is about more than command and response. It is more like a shared understanding, a shared thought' (The Shepherd's Life [Penguin, 2015], pp.217-8). What an extraordinary privilege!

Beloved, we are God's children now: what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we shall see him as he is. (1 John 3.2).

God bless,  
Loveday

(As we head across the fell, we see some ewes ... beyond a deep ghyll on the mountainside opposite. ... Joe, who is cleaning out that ghyll, has sent his dogs to get them. From where he is, he can

scarcely see the sheep they are so far away. He is further away than we are. The dog lurches back, onwards, up and up, climbing higher and higher towards the distant skyline. A whistle or two reassures it that it should keep going for sheep it cannot see yet because of the lie of the land. Then the dog sees the sheep it has been sent for, and knows what to do. It circles behind them and pushes them out of the crags. They twist and turn ever downwards and back towards us, then disappear down the far side of the ghyll. Ten minutes after the dogs were sent for them, the sheep rise up out of the ghyll close to our feet. They are beaten and they know it. They trot obediently across the moorland and join the flow of sheep heading home. The dog sees that we have them now and turns back down to its master deep below. Joe gives us a distant wave and heads off. An old shepherd turns to me and says, 'That is a proper fell dog.' 'Yes,' I acknowledge, 'but don't tell him. His head will swell.' [James Rebanks, *The Shepherd's Life* (Penguin, 2015), p.16.])

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