

He Leadeth Me

It was during the darkest hours of the American Civil War, when a young man freshly out of seminary was supply preaching at the First Baptist Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. It was the intention of Joseph H. Gilmore to preach the same sermon on Psalm 23 that he had preached on three or four previous occasions when he had filled other pulpits. This time, however, Gilmore could barely get past the words in verse 2: "he leadeth me beside still waters."

Gilmore was the son of New Hampshire governor James A. Gilmore. Perhaps, his sensitivities to matters of political governance coupled with the turmoil in which the nation was embroiled led him to this profound emotional reaction to these particular words of Scripture. About the war, Gilmore later wrote:

"... I did not refer to that fact—that is, I don't think I did—but it may subconsciously have led me to realize that God's leadership is the one significant fact in human experience, that it makes no difference how we are led, or whither we are led, so long as we are sure God is leading us.

After the service was over, Gilmore and a number of friends gathered in the parlor of the man who was hosting him. They exchanged their thoughts on this great theme of God's leadership in the affairs of Christians even when by all accounts, the world seemed upside down. That very evening, even as he continued to converse with his friends, Gilmore jotted down some verses on the topic. He then handed the lyrics to his wife and forgot about them.

Apparently, Mrs. Gilmore saw in the lyrics some sentiments worthy of sharing with others. When they returned to New Hampshire, she sent the song to a Boston newspaper, *The Watchman and the Reflector*, where the verses were first printed. Unbeknownst to Gilmore, the prolific church musician, William B. Bradbury, set the lyrics to music. Three years later, when Gilmore went to the Second Baptist Church in Rochester, New York as a candidate for that pulpit, he discovered that his own song, now set to music and published in that church's hymnal, was part of the popular repertoire of that fellowship.

He leadeth me, O blessed thought! O words with heav'nly comfort fraught!
Whate'er I do, where'er I be Still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me.

*He leadeth me, He leadeth me, By His own hand He leadeth me;
His faithful follower I would be, For by His hand He leadeth me.*

The occasions are not at all rare when this life thrusts us into the midst of personal storms that we cannot think, buy, work or whistle our way out of. Government provides no real solutions. Recreational distractions and amusements ultimately fail us. All that remains (but it is more than adequate) is the peace of remembering that a very Good Shepherd is guiding our path.