



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

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A Stephen Ministry Congregation

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Twenty-Fifth Sunday After Pentecost November 15, 2015

“A Beautiful Inheritance”

(Psalm 16)

Rev. David K. Groth

COLLECT: O Lord, by Your bountiful goodness release us from the bonds of our sins, which by reason of our weakness we have brought upon ourselves, that we may stand firm until the day of our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen

The first we hear of David is in 1 Samuel 16. The pressures of being King have rattled Saul's nerves, and his advisors bring in a musician to sooth those nerves. That's David. He had been a young shepherd tending his father's flocks, but there's a lot of dead time for shepherds, just sitting there watching the sheep or goats. My guess is that's when David taught himself the harp . . . not one of those six foot pedal harps used in symphonies today but an ancient harp: small, designed to be light and portable. Can you picture him there working the strings with young but weathered hands, the music of his harp and voice cascading down the hills of Judea?

David was a lot of things: a shepherd, a warrior, a king, sinner and saint, predator and prey . . . through it all he would also be a poet and musician and would write many of the psalms that form the bases of our Psalter, the book of psalms.

Martin Luther called the Book of Psalms "the little Bible". He writes, "I have a notion that the Holy Spirit wanted to compile a short Bible so that anyone who could not read the whole Bible would here have almost an entire summary of it, comprised in one little book." He calls it a "gem," because whereas other books talk about what the saints did, the psalms also give us their words, how they spoke with God and prayed. We can look into their hearts and see what kind of thoughts they had. Where does one find finer words of joy than in the psalms? On the other hand, where do you find deeper, more sorrowful words of sadness? So, too, when the psalmists speak of fear and hope [and anger] they use such words that no painter could so depict. Hence the Psalter is the book that everyone, in

whatever situation he may be, finds in that situation psalms and words that fit his case, that suit him as if they were put there just for his sake, so that he could not put it better himself” (AE 35:253-257).

So, although our psalm today is a psalm of David, each of us can make it our own. We can apply it to our own lives. We can pray it as our own prayer. When David voices his fear, we can still identify, though 3000 years later. When he confidently confesses his trust in the Lord, we can relate to that too. The psalms become our prayer book. So let’s go through Psalm 16 verse by verse to see how this might work.

Verse 1: Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge. We don’t know what David is worried about in this psalm. It could be any number of things: Goliath, or his countrymen. Saul, or Absalom, or some unknown assassin within his royal court. It doesn’t really matter. In fact, he’s purposefully vague so we can fill in the blanks with our own fears. After all, there are any number swirling around in our minds: sudden and evil death. “Preserve me O God, for in you I take refuge.” Or money troubles, high debt, insufficient savings and uncertain employment. Or maybe we fear illness, some known diagnosis, or perhaps something we only fear because of heredity. “Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge.” I know one of my fears is harming another due to my inattentive driving: not seeing the bicyclist in downtown Madison, or the child while backing up in a crowded parking lot. “Preserve me from that, O God.” See how David’s prayer from 3,000 years ago can become your own?

Verse 2, “I say to the LORD, ‘you are my Lord; I have no good apart from you.’” That’s a healthy thing for all of us to say regularly. Whatever good we possess comes ultimately from him. He is the source. And we need the reminder, lest we start thinking we are self-made and self-sufficient, which is, of course, idolatry.

Verse 3, “As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight.” Earlier this summer I played a golf outing with my brothers and cousin

Mike. It was a team event so I got a snarky little text message from brother Andy, “Work on your putting” with three exclamation points. I wrote back, “Tamed that beast long ago” which, if you’ve seen me putt you’d see the humor. In any case I did work on my putting, and because it was a big event the practice green was filled with men. Based on the cars in the parking lot and the ritzy environment these were people of influence and affluence, a wealthy, powerful group. Maybe a politician’s dream, but not my kind of people. Course humor about women, foul language (not in anger, just common usage), withering comments about others. I don’t want to overstate the case, (and surely there were exceptions), but the noisiest ones were not Christian gentlemen. I’m sure they could play the part in other venues, but as they say, you get to know the true character of a man on a golf course. I was glad when the play finally began and it was just the four of us out on the fairways. David too preferred keeping company with people of faith. “As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight.” We share so much more with the saints, whatever skin color, language or socio-economic background, we share so much more with the saints because we share Christ. Psalm 84 says “I’d rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked.”

Verse 4, “The sorrows of those who run after another god shall multiply; their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names on my lips.”

David wants nothing to do with other gods. He wants clean, sharp distinctions between his faith and that of other gods. He doesn’t even want the language of other faiths to pass through his mouth.

A recent study found American Christians are not nearly so careful or discerning, mixing their Christian faith with Eastern or New Age beliefs, almost like a cocktail, a pinch of this, dash of that. In a sample size of over 4000, 29% of American Christians have tried to consult with the dead. 15% have consulted a fortuneteller or psychic. 23%

believe there is spiritual energy in trees and stones and the like. 22% believe in reincarnation. God has warned us time and again, “I the Lord your God am a jealous God” which means he doesn’t want to share us with other gods. Because he’s jealous it must mean he loves us, but it also means he gets angry when his people go whoring after other gods. David wants no part of it, and point us again to the Lord saying in **Verse 5, “The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot.”**

Then verse 6: “The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.” The lines David speaks of are measuring lines, the kind used to mark the boundaries of real estate. Remember how the Lord apportioned the Promised Land to his people, giving them plots and fields and vineyards by lot. David says the lines have fallen for me in pleasant places. He’s been richly blessed. But can’t we all say that? The shelter you live in, the spouse you love and who loves you back. “The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places.” Think of your work which gives you the ability to care for your family and bless others. Think of the things that give you joy, travel, hobbies, the morning newspaper with a cup of coffee, simmering soup on a cold, crummy day. “The lines have fallen in pleasant places.” David acknowledges God’s generosity in the past, but also confidently looks forward to the future. “Indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance” he says. In other words, the Lord is not finished blessing us. He’s just warming up! All who trust in him have a beautiful inheritance. 1 John 5, “God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.” And in John 14 Jesus said, “In my Father’s house are many rooms, and I am going there to prepare a place for you” (v. 3). Therefore each of us, as baptized children of God can say, “I have a beautiful inheritance.”

Verses 7-8: “I bless the LORD who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me. I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.” David prayed and meditated on God’s Word nightly. And all the council *we*

need comes from that Word of God, for he is the Counselor. As Christians, we don't need to bother with horoscopes or palm readers or any of that nonsense. As Christians we don't need to know what the future holds. We only need to know the Lord will be there. Deuteronomy 31, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you." And in Matthew, Jesus promised, "Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Mt. 28:20). And so David writes, "Because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken."

Verse 9: "Therefore my heart is glad and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure." David is enjoying the peace which surpasses all human understanding. He's not afraid of anything the future may bring. Even death holds no terrors over him, because he knows God's power and love do not stop at the grave. The Lord's salvation is not just for the spirit but also the body. "I know my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. After my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God" (Job 19:25). And again from 1 Thessalonians, "The Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise" (4:16). And again, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies" (Jn. 11:25) and again, "Christ will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body" (Phil. 3:21). And so David writes, "My heart is glad and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure."

Verse 10: "For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption." Just as it was impossible for death to keep its hold on Jesus, so it will be impossible for death to keep its hold on us. Though we must still pass through physical death, Christ will keep us in peaceful rest until the trumpet sounds and his voice awakens us.

And finally verse 11: “You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” Sinful man sometimes thinks of heaven as that place where all carnal yearnings are finally satisfied. ISIS warriors in Syria and Iraq love those multiple passages in the Quran that promise erotic rewards in heaven if they die as martyrs on earth, to the tune of 72 young women per martyr, which just doesn’t sound like the Word of God but rather the words of men. The Bible makes no such promises. But the Bible does promise “fullness of joy” in heaven. We cannot now know what that looks like, but we do know there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, and that he will tenderly wipe every tear from our eyes (Rev. 21:4). Fullness of joy. Nothing lacking. Nothing missed. No disappointing gap between expectation and gift. Fullness of joy. Pleasures forevermore. And God has made known to us the path of life, and that path is, of course, his Son Jesus. “I am the Way” Jesus said. “No one comes to the Father except through me.”

So that’s Psalm 16. David wrote it, probably sang it too while his hands worked the strings of his harp on some Judean hillside. But it’s a psalm each of us can apply to our own lives. We can own it for ourselves, pray it as our own prayer. This psalm gives us the words and shows us how we can articulate our trust, our praise, our thanks, and our anticipation of the fullness of joy at God’s right hand. Amen.

