

Psalm 16
I Peter 1:3-9

Fifth Sunday of Easter
Midway Presbyterian Church
May 15, 2022

The Fullness of Joy

Introduction to the Psalm

Our psalm today starts with a petition, but quickly becomes an eloquent profession of faith. It is often called a psalm of trust. And in that trust is the fullness of joy. Listen to these words from Psalm 16...

Introduction to the Epistle

1 Peter is a letter written to encourage Gentiles to embrace their identity as followers of Jesus Christ and remain faithful in the face of pressure to conform to the larger world's social and religious values. Peter declares a living hope that comes from Christ's resurrection. Listen to these words from 1 Peter 1:3-9...

Sermon

Sadly, for many Christians Easter on this Fifth Sunday of Easter, the triumphant chorus of Handel's Messiah is a faint echo of what we heard on Easter morning. It seems that things are pretty much back to normal. Young people are beginning to think of swimming and summer vacation, and grownups are beginning to think of cooking out and upcoming trips. Yet, it is possible that we can find a little more assurance in our Lord's victory over sin and death. A little more confident that because he lives we shall live also. A little more willing to join with others in reaching out to people in need, in the name of Jesus Christ.

And this Fifth Sunday of Easter is a good time to hear the Psalmist's words about faith and trust. To receive bread for the journey of faith. To hear how he felt close to God, wherever

he went, whatever he did. To know God's presence and care, even in the face of death. To become sure that God's grace will be sufficient for all our needs.

Which leads us to that strange little phrase in our Bibles at the top of the Psalm—"A Mitkam of David." A mitkam? What in the world is that? Well, the meaning has long been uncertain. The translation for "mitkam" here, as found in the Septuagint, the primary Greek translation of the Old Testament, for Psalm 16 reads, "stone inscription." It could be a literary or musical term. Martin Luther said it was "a golden jewel."

But one student of the text reports that although the meaning of "mitkam" remains unclear, it always stands in the superscription of Davidic prayers occasioned by great danger. Though a psalm of confidence, it begins in the midst of trial and suffering. In the very first verse we hear, "Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge."

What do we do when we're in trouble, when we're suffering, when we're sorely tempted to go back to old ways that we know have not helped, when our world seems to be falling apart? Well, like the psalmist, we pray. Though we may sometimes feel like the disciples in the face of the storm at sea—fearful and of little faith (Mt. 8:22-25)—we can pray.

In the Fourth Century Ambrose of Milan offered the following prayer to God:

You are medicine for me when I am sick.
 You are my strength when I need help.
 You are life itself when I fear death.
 You are the way when I long for heaven.
 You are light when all is dark.
 You are my food when I need nourishment! Amen

Our Westminster Shorter Catechism begins with the question, "What is the chief end of man?" And the answer: "To glorify God and enjoy Him forever." Well, theologian John Piper has suggested an altering of the answer to: "The chief end of man is to glorify God BY enjoying him forever." As Piper explains, "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him."

The French philosopher, Blaise (blaze) Pascal, says that all men seek happiness and that this motive is at the root of everything we do. And C. S. Lewis points out that, contrary to what many think, the Bible consistently appeals to our desire for lasting pleasure. But that pleasure is not found in the pleasures that people often seek, but in knowing and following Jesus Christ.

Psalm 16 is about experiencing joy and pleasure in God:

You show me the path of life.
In your presence there is fullness of joy;
in your right hand are pleasures forevermore. (v. 11)

The German scholar, Franz Delitzsch (DAY lich), wrote of Psalm 16: “There reigns in the whole Psalm, a settled calm, and inward joy, and a joyous confidence, which is certain that everything that it can desire for the present and for the future it possesses in its God.” The message of the Psalm is: When we make the Lord our supreme treasure, we will know joy and pleasure in Him, now and forever.

In verse 6 we read of the goodly heritage that the psalmist knows. He is not boasting of the land he has received, but expressing gratitude for the fact that the Lord is his inheritance. And in a similar way, our Epistle from I Peter speaks of an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept for us in heaven. In this inheritance we can rejoice, even if presently we suffer various trials.

Yes, the psalmist has come to live in the light of God’s presence and care. He’s grateful for the counsel God gives, even at night in the midst of darkness. In short, the psalmist manifests a life of trust. On our currency—on our pennies, nickels, dimes, and quarters; on our dollar bills, our 5’s, our 10’s and 20’s, is written, “In God We Trust.” But do most people really trust in God? Even after celebrating the resurrection of our crucified Lord, do we Christians really trust in him?

Sometimes it seems that our trust is in fact more in our education, our ingenuity, our financial planning, our family ties. We may even come to trust in alcohol, drugs, sports cars, or fleeting pleasure, thereby, multiplying our sorrow. We trust in many, many things, but do we trust in God?

Pastor and author, Elizabeth Magill, tells the following personal story:

There are many idols which I have worshipped in my life by spending time, money, energy, and thoughts on them – figurative “drink offerings of blood.” Throughout my life, I have desperately wanted to attend one of the most prestigious universities in the nation. Being much younger than my siblings, I watched them go through college with success and I determined to get the best SAT scores and be smarter than all of them. I was driven by this competition with my family members and fellow peers, causing me to work hard in high school and think that I could go to whatever school I wanted.

I applied to several schools with cutthroat acceptance rates, as well as a couple back-up schools. I’ll never forget the night when I scrolled down a webpage at 12:15 in the morning and found out that I was accepted to the school of my dreams, into the program of my dreams. However, I’ll also never forget the day a couple weeks later when I scrolled down a webpage to find out that the financial aid I had been given would cause me an astronomical amount of debt. It seemed unfair, because it was due to a unique financial situation in my family that I couldn’t control.

So many times I told my dad – “This is my big break!” I could get a good job and pay off the debt later. Here was the culmination of years of looking to academics as my god. When I struggled socially or felt alone, I looked ahead to college in which I would “prove everyone wrong” and be successful, even if I felt small now. My identity had been founded in my own ability and not in the way in which God loves.

Have we been looking for joy and peace in all the wrong places? St. Augustine said, “Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee.”

Sara Groves captures what the psalmist seems to feel in her song, “He’s Always Been Faithful”:

This is my anthem, this is my song,
the theme of the stories I’ve heard for so long.
God has been faithful, he will be again.
His loving compassion, it knows no end.

It has been said that if we want to be like someone, we should just do what they do. If we want to be a runner, then learn to do what runners do; if we want to be a pianist, learn to do what pianists do; if we want to be a writer, learn to do what writers do. Well, the same principle can apply here—learn to follow the example of the psalmist’s trust. If we want the joy and peace that he knows, we should just do what he does—trust completely in a God who has been and will be faithful and true. For as the psalmist reminds us, the only path down which God will take us is the Path of Life. And in God’s presence is the fullness of joy.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.