

Psalm 16
I Peter 1:3-9

Second Sunday of Easter
Midway Presbyterian Church
April 16, 2023

A Life of Trust

Introduction to the Psalm

Much like that beloved 23rd Psalm, our psalm today is a prayer in which the psalmist expresses confidence, trust, and devotion to the Lord who shows him the path of life. Listen to these words from Psalm 16...

Introduction to the Epistle Lesson

Our Epistle Lesson is addressed to Christians in Asia Minor between 62 – 64 A.D., or perhaps some years later. Its purpose is to fortify them in the face of persecution. These people include Gentile Christian slaves and women—people at the bottom of the social structure. And to them is proclaimed good news of a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. While they may anticipate no earthly inheritance, they can know an inheritance that is eternal. Listen to these words from First Peter 1:3-9...

Sermon

Easter for Christians is not just one day, but rather a 50-day period. The season of Easter, or Eastertide, begins at sunset on the eve of Easter and ends on Pentecost Sunday, the day we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit and the day we recognize the birth of the Church (Acts 2).

Easter is also more than just an extended celebration of the resurrection of Jesus. In the early church, Lent was a time for new converts to learn about the faith and prepare for baptism on Easter Sunday. And the purpose of the 50-day Easter season was to continue the faith formation of new Christians. So the season of Easter gives us time to rejoice and appreciate what it means when we say, “The Lord is risen.” And it gives us time to think about how we are to live as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ.

That said, for most Christians today, Easter can now be barely seen in the rear view mirror. For today the magnificent chorus of Handel's Messiah is a faint echo of what we heard on Easter Sunday. "Our triumphant holy day" is now "Low Sunday." Those dyed Easter eggs that became part of the potato salad—they're gone, along with the ham. The lilies are gone from the sanctuary, and Cindy Evans isn't wearing that lovely hat. The pews aren't nearly as full, and some of the Easter congregation we won't see again until Christmas. It seems that things are pretty much back to normal. And we might ask if anything has changed. Well, I hope so. I hope that we 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.

Yes, this Second 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 consider the trust that the psalmist seemed to know so well. Of 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 Miktam (mik' täm) of David." A miktam? What in the world is that? Well, the meaning has long been uncertain. The translation for "miktam" as found in the primary Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, for Psalm 16 reads, "stone inscription." Martin Luther said it was "a golden jewel." It could be a literary or musical term.

But one student of the text reports that though the meaning of "miktam" 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 of our psalm he prays, "Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge."

Former Assistant Professor of Worship at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia, Kimberly Bracken Long tells the following story:

After my father's funeral, my mother shared all sorts of memorabilia with the family: the seersucker sport coat and the white bucks that fit my older son perfectly; the collection of Orioles caps; the photographs of my father as a young boy, riding a scooter with his constant companion, Skippy, a Boston bull terrier. There were letters and notes and sermons.

Then my mother showed me a few typewritten pages that took my breath away and made the tears flow. On those pages were the words my father said at the grave of my stillborn sisters. My mother had carried the twins full term before it was clear that something had gone wrong. What had been a growing wave of joy in our family came crashing down when the girls were lost to us even before they were born.

It was different in those days, there was no funeral or even a time of prayer with the family. My parents refused to allow the hospital to dispose of the bodies, however, and my father took the girls to be buried in the family plot. Only one dear friend accompanied him. Though it was only the two of them, there were things that needed to be said. For all of the pain in my father's heart, all he could do was give thanks for the goodness of God—the God who welcomed my sisters home, the God who held our lives in divine hands, the God whose faithfulness is beyond measure.

No, preachers are not immune to the heartaches of life. But they too can know the God whose faithfulness is beyond measure.

What do we do when we're in trouble, when we're suffering, when our world seems to be falling apart? What *can* we do? Well, like the psalmist, we can pray, though we may sometimes feel like the disciples in the face of the storm at sea—fearful and of little faith (Mt. 8:26). In our Old Testament lesson the psalmist expresses trust and confidence before threat.

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 is... “To glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” Well, theologian John Piper has suggested an altering of the answer to this: “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 Pascal, says that all people 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)

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 to Christians who are persecuted and of low social status. It speaks of God’s great mercy in giving a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Christ from the dead. Into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept for us in heaven. No matter what our status or earthly inheritance we may hope for, there is another inheritance of much more value that is ours because of Easter.

Yesterday on my way to the Clemson Spring Game, I stopped by the Poinsett Nursing Home in Greenville to see Mark Sears. For those of you who don’t know, Mark has a neurological disorder that has caused him to be bedridden for many years. He can’t talk or walk. Well, in my visit I told him about what First Peter says about the inheritance that is ours. The one that God has for us in heaven. In that place where there will be no sickness or sorrow.

I am told that the Bible makes more than 250 references to “inheritance.” Perhaps the most memorable one is in Luke 15 where the younger son asks his father to go ahead and give him his share of the estate now. And he proceeded to squander it in riotous ways in a distant country. (Lk. 15:11-32)

Years ago when I was serving a church in North Mississippi, a father died. There was conflict over the inheritance, and two sons who were members of the church were so angry at each other that they wouldn’t come to church, lest they see and be in the company of the other.

The thing about all earthly inheritances is that they lack permanence. But for believers, Peter declares that we have an inheritance that is “imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.” (1:4) In this we can rejoice, even if we suffer many trials and tribulations.

The German scholar, Franz Delitzsch, 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.

Yes, the psalmist has come to live in the light of God’s presence, love, and care. He’s grateful for the counsel God gives, even at night in the midst of darkness. The Lord is the “ground of his being.” Through praise, he keeps God at the center of his life. Conscious of the power and loving-kindness of the Lord, he is not unsettled by lesser things. In short, the psalmist manifests a life of trust.

On our currency—on our pennies, nickels, dimes, and quarters; on our 1’s and 5’s, our 10’s and 20’s, is written, “In God We Trust.” But do we really? Even after celebrating the resurrection of our crucified Lord, do we 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. As a church, we sometimes trust in “the way things have always been done.” As a nation, we may trust in our military might, our technological advances, our wealth, and sometimes in our political leaders. We trust in many, many things, but our trust in God is often just an afterthought—at best.

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.”

Maybe throughout this season of Easter we should just try to follow the psalmist’s example of trust. If we want the joy and peace that he knows, we should just do what he does—trust completely in our 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 those who choose another god only multiply their sorrows.

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