

Life is Good Ps. 16 5/16/21

Well, it's been quite a year, hasn't it? We have lost people we love to the virus, experienced isolation and all kinds of shutdowns, as well as the inconveniences of social distancing and mask-wearing. So many of our sermons have necessarily focused on how Christian faith speaks to the hardships of our lives. But, thank God, hardship and disorientation are not all there is to life! There are also good things- like the beauty of the Spring season, the baptism of children, and the birth of a granddaughter! In Ps. 16, King David, who was intimately acquainted with both the joys and sorrows of life, outlines what it means to trust in God through the whole range of life's experiences.

The Psalm is printed in your bulletin, so please follow along while I read.

¹Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge.

²I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you."

³As for the holy ones in the land, they are the noble, in whom is all my delight.

⁴Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows; their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names upon my lips.

⁵The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot.

⁶The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; I have a goodly heritage.

⁷*I bless the LORD who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me.*

⁸*I keep the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.*

⁹*Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also rests secure.*

¹⁰*For you do not give me up to Sheol, or let your faithful one see the Pit.*

¹¹*You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forevermore. (Ps. 16:1-11)*

Let's work through the Psalm verse by verse and see what we can learn. The Psalm begins, "¹*Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge.*" ²*I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you."*" (Ps. 16:1,2) Here, he trusts God to protect him. David needed God's protection many times during his life- when he was pursued by King Saul and during an insurrection led by his son, for example. And David found that God was faithful in watching over him. In response to God's protection, David says, "You are my Lord..." The ruler over my life. So, in addition to affirming his trust in God to protect him, he affirms his own personal commitment to God as the Lord of his life.

He develops that thought further in the next two verses.

³*As for the holy ones in the land, they are the noble, in whom is all my delight.*

⁴Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows; their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names upon my lips. (Ps. 16:3-4)

He acknowledges that there are other gods- in his day Baal, Chemosh, and Molech- but obeying the first commandment, he states that he will not pay homage to them. For he believes that they are a dead end; “*Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows,*” he says.

There are still gods other than the Lord today. They are named money, power, pleasures, alcohol, popularity, comfort, and security, to name just a few of the things in which we trust to meet our needs. But devotion to these things ends up multiplying our sorrows, because these gods can't deliver what they promise any more than Baal, Chemosh, and Molech could. And, even if we have decided that we won't trust in these other gods to give us a good life, we're tempted to pair them with our allegiance to God. So, we commit ourselves to “God and...” God and family. God and money. God and country. God and security. You get the picture. The Psalmist, however, rejects *any* trust in other gods, and aligns himself only with the Lord.

As a result, the Psalmist believes he has received a blessed life from God. He writes, “*⁵The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot.*”

⁶The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; I have a goodly heritage. (Ps. 16:5,6)

These lines echo back to the book of Joshua, when God divided the Promised Land of Canaan among the tribes and clans of Israel, giving them a wonderful heritage. As David reflects on his life, he sees that God has been very good to him, that he has received a bountiful life from God. I think that's true of most of us! We have been blessed with good spouses and families. We have nice, dry homes to live in. We have plenty to eat—some might say too much to eat! We have jobs that provide for us, and we enjoy many freedoms, relative safety and peace. “The boundary lines have fallen in pleasant places for us.” For that, we give thanks to God!

But, that doesn't mean that life is without challenges. The Psalmist is not a Pollyanna! Verse 7. *⁷I bless the LORD who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me.*

⁸I keep the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. (Ps. 16:7,8)

Feeling the responsibilities of being a king, David needed God's counsel, which he received. He read the scripture during the day, and received advice from godly people. And then he meditated on God's Word at night. That was how he kept the Lord “always before me,” and that is

how we can do the same. We can regularly immerse ourselves in God's Word, both individually and in groups, and then we can meditate on the best way to apply what we're learning throughout the day and night. That gives us the sense that God is at "our right hand," a battlefield term for the one who protects our flank. Which brings us to the conclusion.

⁹Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also rests secure.

¹⁰For you do not give me up to Sheol (the place of the dead), or let your faithful one see the Pit.

¹¹You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forevermore. (Ps. 16:9-11)

Because God is at his right hand, David can rejoice in heart, soul, and body. His whole person is affected by his trust in God. David professes that he trusts God in life and in death. I wonder if the author of the Heidelberg Catechism had these verses in mind when, in answer to the question, "What is your only comfort in life and death?" he writes, "That I am not my own, but belong with body and soul, both in life and in death, to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ." In this Psalm, we find someone who has learned to trust God in all of life's circumstances, so he can rejoice with God, a God who dispenses all the pleasures of life!

But trusting God is not easy. Charles Blondin was a world-renowned tightrope walker and acrobat in the mid-1800's. On June 30, 1859, in front of an awestruck crowd of 100,000, he became the first person to cross Niagara Falls on a tightrope. It was a terrifying 1100-foot walk averaging 200' above the falls! But Blondin wasn't finished. In the ensuing years, he crossed the falls many times- on stilts, in a sack, and even pushing a wheelbarrow! One day an enthusiastic fan yelled out that he believed Blondin could safely cross the falls even if there were a person sitting in the wheelbarrow. Blondin agreed and invited the man to jump in. The fan nervously declined!

That's the difference between intellectual assent- "I believe Blondin can push a person in a wheelbarrow across the falls," vs. trust- I get in the wheelbarrow and go for a ride! And that's the difference between a powerless, joyless cognitive belief in God, and an active, life-changing trust. God invites us to entrust our lives to him, rejoicing and giving thanks for the blessings, and resting secure in his love when things are going badly. Trusting God with our lives, we can risk speaking out for truth and justice when we have the opportunity. We can risk giving generously of our money to God's work, when it feels more secure to keep it all for ourselves. We choose to trust God to meet our basic human needs for security and meaning, rather than trusting other gods or substances to do so. Why?

Because, we believe- we trust- that in God's presence is fullness of joy,
and in God's right hand are pleasures that last forevermore.