

“My Portion and My Cup”

Introduction: When we returned from vacation last week and I took Rama’s bicycle off the car and wheeled it around the house to the basement door in order to put it away, I discovered that the basement door was open and that it had evidently left it open for our entire vacation! (I guess I was in a hurry to leave!) After searching the basement to make sure there were no critters who had moved in, I gave thanks that we live in a relatively safe neighborhood, one in which such an oversight doesn’t turn out to be costly.

And yet, no matter how safe our neighborhoods, we still live in a world where the daily news is full of disaster and despair, shootings and scandals, conflict and outright hatred. What helps us to move forward, to not be shaken but to stand secure?

The writer of Psalm 16 helps us to ponder. He begins with a plea for safety and moves on to an expression of confident trust. While the storms and insecurities of life do not disappear (as we learned in the parable of the wise and foolish builders; Ma. 7:24-27), God remains our firm foundation, our portion and our cup. Let’s hear the words of the psalmist, and then consider what moves him to so trust. [READ]

I. A Plea for Safety

A. “Keep me safe, my God...” While we think this plea came from the pen of David, we’re not sure of the circumstances that brought it on. The best guess is that it was during those days when a jealous King Saul was chasing David around, even trying to take his life. But the fact that we’re not sure of the exact issue actually makes this plea more accessible to us. It leaves space, in other words, for us to fill in the blank with our own needs for safety. From what do you need protection? From the waters of a hurricane? From the loss of your job? From the weakening of your faith due to a time of suffering you are experiencing? From an act or attitude of prejudice toward you? The possibilities are endless!

One of you called me on your way into work last week knowing that you would be facing an interaction with a difficult colleague, one who had actually wronged you. You wanted to be kept safe from responding in an angry or vengeful manner, kept safe from saying something you would later regret. What would your plea be?

B. While we don’t know the exact nature of David’s plea, we do know the exact God to whom he was crying out. He identifies this God as the LORD, the personal name of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of Moses, the God who had rescued his people from slavery in Egypt and brought them to a new home in the Promised Land. This is the God who would eventually reveal himself in Jesus. Crying out to this God is significant because we see that the psalmist knows there are other options, other gods that he can make sacrifices to (“pour out libations of blood”) and call upon (“take up their names on my lips”).

C. In point of fact, we were made to worship. The question is, who, or what will it be? I think here of the Israelites who, when Moses had gone up the mountain to spend time with the LORD and didn’t seem like he was coming back, cried out to his brother Aaron, “Come, make us gods who will go before us” (Ex. 32:1). They needed to worship something.

Such somethings, we could say, represent the various idols that seek to draw us near, the things we believe we need to have in order to be safe, happy and secure, idols of possessions, or other people, or those that promise us position or power of some kind. These kinds of things may look good, and they may tempt us to want to run after them, but they will all, ultimately, fail to provide us with the refuge we need. The psalmist knows that he couldn't go godless, and he also knows that it was the LORD, not any other god, who had been the source of goodness in his life in the past, and who would be the source of all things good in the future.

D. In the midst of this crying out to the LORD, don't miss that the psalmist identifies the invaluable help of the LORD's people, the community that this "holy people" provide and in which the psalmist delights. Part of the refuge the LORD provides is the help and comfort of his people, the help and comfort of those who are not running after other gods and so can be instrumental in keeping this fellow running after the LORD.

To this end, it is our desire on coming Wednesday nights to think intentionally about community and what a helpful community looks like through our topic, "Find Your People: Building Deep Community in a Lonely World." It might also be helpful to you to think about joining in a small group that meets regularly to reflect on God's word, share what's going on in your life, and pray for one another, all as a part of "keeping you safe" from that which might be making you shaky.

II. An Expression of Confident Trust

A. The remainder of the psalm becomes an expression of trust in the LORD, the one who he names as his portion and cup – his real wealth and real strength and comfort. The LORD who had provided a place to live in the land, the LORD who offers counsel both day and night, the LORD who is present at his right hand, who will not abandon him to the grave, who will fill him with joy and pleasure as he makes known the path of life.

B. Such trust expressed in this psalm looks both backward and forward. It looks back to Psalm 15, which ends, "Whoever does these things will never be shaken" and which parallels intriguingly with v. 8 of our psalm: "I keep my eyes always on the LORD. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken." What things, we might wonder? The body of Psalm 15 spells it out: who does what is righteous, who speaks truth from the heart, whose tongue utters no slander, who does no wrong to a neighbor and casts no slur on another, who honors those who fear the LORD, who keeps his word, who lends to the poor without interest, and who does not accept a bribe. That's the pattern and path of life that God sets before us. That's what it looks like to keep your eye on the LORD and experience him alongside you ("at my right hand") as your companion for the journey. If we are open to his instruction, which is largely about loving our neighbor well, we are building on a firm foundation. The storms of life will not shake us.

C. As well, Psalm 16 looks forward, to the grounding of our hope, our confidence and trust, in the death and resurrection of Jesus. David probably knows nothing of this when he wrote, but both Peter and Paul, in sermons recorded in the book of Acts (2:22-33 and 13:35), reference this psalm where it says, "nor will you let your faithful one see decay" (v. 10), as anticipating the resurrection of Jesus. And it is such sovereignty over death that gives both the psalmist, and us his readers, confident trust in God. As Paul spells it out in 1 Thessalonians:

Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. . . Therefore, encourage one another with these words.” [vv. 13-14, 18]

Our hope, in other words, does not eliminate those things which cause us to grieve, but it is also not just wishful thinking. It is secured in what Jesus has done in space, time, and history and helps us strengthen and encourage us in those times when are apt to become shaken. What that looks like we'll explore in our adult SS class this fall. For now, let us go to the table of the LORD where we are called to come and taste a portion of his goodness and a sip from the cup of his strength.