

Sermon Draft for April 20, 2025, Easter

Text: Psalm 16

Sermon: “Our Refuge, Our Hope, Our Life”

Our text for this Easter celebration is our Psalm. David begins Psalm 16 with a prayer request for help in the midst of whatever trouble he’s found himself in this time. But the interesting thing is that verse 1 is the last prayer request in this psalm! The whole rest of the psalm is David expressing his faith in why he takes refuge in the Lord and exclaiming just how good it is to belong to him.

We should ask a simple question. How did the life of King David turn out in history? Well, he died and was buried. His corpse saw corruption. Does that mean that David’s confidence was misplaced? No. The Spirit of Christ was speaking through him in the psalms. And after King David there came along the Son of David who is David’s Lord: namely, Jesus of Nazareth. He is the ultimate Davidic King, the Davidic Messiah. He died and was buried just like David, but unlike David his corpse did not see corruption. God raised him up bodily from the grave.

“This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it” (Psalm 118:24). For Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Alleluia! And because he lives, so shall we!

As we read the psalms, we should recognize that they are Spirit-inspired prayers. In the psalms God gives us words we can use to talk to him. So, Psalm 16 is a psalm of trust, a confession of faith, that helps us voice our faith and trust in the Lord. In this psalm, we hear faith expressing itself, declaring that in a world of trouble, uncertainty, and death, the Resurrection of Jesus guarantees that He is our refuge in life, our hope in death, our joy in eternity.

“Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge” (v 1). Behind this psalm is some situation of danger. It’s not specifically stated what it is, although we do get a few hints as the psalm goes on. Whatever it is, David is in trouble and is crying out for help, for a refuge, a place of safety that cannot be shaken.

If anyone ever needed a safe place, it was David! He spent half his life on the run from people who wanted to kill him! First King Saul, then foreign kings and leaders, and then even his own son Absalom! David knew his vulnerability, but he also had his safe house, God. God was David's refuge, his safe place.

We need protection, security, and assurance as troubling situations come into our own lives. People go to great efforts to have security. They build fallout shelters and safe rooms in their homes; they stockpile supplies and arm themselves. But there is nothing in this world with a reliable foundation. There is nothing in this world that will last. There is nothing in and of this world that will not be shaken and pass away.

David knew that no one besides the Lord could be a real shelter from the storm. But he recognized that God was his safe place in this unpredictable world. Likewise, when we pray this psalm for God's protection, we are guaranteed of his refuge, for today we know that even death could not disarm Christ.

It's a striking phrase that the Lord is our refuge, for a refuge is usually a place, a shelter from danger. For us as God's people, our refuge is not primarily a place but a person, the risen Christ. He is the supreme good in life (v 2).

The Lord promises to be with us always. Obviously, it's no help to have a refuge that isn't nearby. A refuge is only helpful if it's somewhere we can actually shelter. And this was the huge question Jesus' followers faced as this Easter morning dawned. How could their Lord be with them now? But Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! And so, we join with King David and pray, ***“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”*** (vs 7–8).

This is familiar language. We usually speak of the Lord's right hand and the hope that one day we will be there at his side. But here it's about our right hand. Christ is risen to be here with us!

The Lord is our refuge that cannot be shaken, he's our right-hand man and therefore we cannot be shaken, as King David confessed.

We sense this especially in the community of God's people. **"As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight"** (v 3). During times of worship in the temple, David received instruction and strength from God. In his time of worship, he found refuge from his troubles. Today, above all days we as God's people gather together to receive his grace through his Word and Sacrament, and we are strengthened! We are rooted and built up in him and established in the faith!

Especially on this day, we have the assurance of Jesus' presence here with us. Through his resurrection and bodily appearances, Jesus proved that the word and promises of God are true. Thus, like King David, we, too, can pray in confidence that the risen and living Lord is at our right hand, ever present with us. For at one of those post-Easter appearances he promised, **"Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age"** (Matthew 28:20).

His presence is truly all that we need, because he surely lives to give us all we need, even for this life. Faith finds contentment in this and nothing else. In Jesus risen and living, we have all that's necessary for life and living, even in this uncertain world.

And so, David says, ***“The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance”*** (vs 5–6). David reminds us in our self-centered culture that life is not something we achieve but rather something we receive as a gracious gift from God. God himself is the greatest blessing in life, and thanks to Jesus' resurrection, he lives to bless us! Faith looks to the Lord as the foundation for everything. And since the Lord is risen, living, we know with certainty that he is our refuge in life. He is our life!

The Lord is also our hope in death. ***“For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol [that is, the grave or the place of the dead], or let your holy one see corruption”*** (v 10). David's situation as he wrote this psalm was deadly serious. It was clearly life threatening.

But there is a tremendous confidence here that even death is no match for the Lord. That the Lord would not give him up to that place of the dead. Of course that doesn't mean we're not going to die at all, but it means that even in death God won't give up on us. Death is not the end. Which is what makes Easter and the reason we celebrate Easter the most significant and life-changing event ever.

This is the foundation of our faith. It's one thing for the Lord to be our refuge in life, but we also die. Death is our common enemy that we all face. Even with all modern medicine, the mortality rate still sits at 100 percent. How can the psalmist David pray with this confidence that the Lord will not abandon his soul to the grave forever? How can we pray like that with confidence that when we face death it's not the end, or when our loved ones die it's not the end?

This psalm is quoted twice in the New Testament; both the apostle Peter and the apostle Paul tell us that this psalm is ultimately about Jesus Christ. That it is about his death and resurrection. That he is our hope in the face of death.

Listen to these verses from Peter’s sermon on Pentecost: ***“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. For David says concerning him, ‘I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken’”*** (Acts 2:22–25). Did you catch Psalm 16 here? Peter says that David prayed this psalm speaking of Jesus.

And then Peter goes on, ***“Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he [Christ] was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses”*** (2:29–32).

Jesus died. As we read in the letter to the Hebrews, it was necessary for him to die as that once-for-all sacrifice for your sins and mine. Or, as Paul says in Romans, ***“God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”*** (Romans 5:8). But death could not hold him. His Father did not abandon him in death but raised him to life. The resurrection of Jesus, as Peter and Paul declared, is the ultimate fulfillment of this psalm.

Because we are baptized into Jesus, we are united into his death and resurrection, and we can live and die in confidence that God will not abandon us in death. Christ's resurrection is the firstfruits, and we are the harvest that will follow. He is the Head, and we are his Body, and where the Head has gone, the Body will follow. Thus, he is our hope in death.

And yet, there's more. Because Jesus lives, he is our joy in eternity.

Verse 11 of our text: ***“You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”*** Joy in this life can be elusive. Times of joy that we experience don't last as long as we'd like. Your team wins a championship, and the joy fades as the next year brings one loss after another. Sports fans in the face of the agony of defeat look forward to next year and next year and . . .

But our psalm speaks of a time and place where there is a fullness of joy, a joy that never ends, where there are pleasures forevermore.

It's not just that our Lord is our refuge in this life or our hope in death, but this is all leading somewhere. There is a goal, a destination for this Christian journey. We are pilgrims in this life traveling home. Throughout the trek the Lord is there with us, supplying all we need for our bodies and life.

He's our refuge and strength when we need him most, and when death comes, he is there with us; his rod and his staff, they comfort us. He is the Lord and Giver of life and the Conqueror of death, and he has prepared a place for us, that where he is there we shall be also. By Jesus' resurrection, we have a guaranteed ***“inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you”*** (1 Peter 1:4).

The sufferings of this life cannot be compared to the glory that awaits us in heaven with him.

Because of Jesus' death and resurrection, there is life beyond this life, and beyond death there is an eternal joy where there will be no more sin, no more sorrow, no more pain or sickness or death, only pleasures forevermore, unending joy in the Lord. Easter guarantees that the best is yet to come.

In Jesus name! Amen