

PSALM 16

- 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.'*
- 3 As for the holy ones in the land, they are the noble,
in whom is all my delight.
- 4 Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows;*
their drink-offerings of blood I will not pour out
or take their names upon my lips.
- 5 The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup;
you hold my lot.
- 6 The 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 for evermore.

I HAVE SEEN THE LORD

“I have seen the Lord,” Mary Magdalene said with conviction. “I have seen him, I have seen him, I have seen him. Christ the Lord is risen. Christ the Lord is risen indeed!”

Mary’s closest friends hardly believed her on the first day she told this story. I can’t imagine anyone’s enthusiasm or interest in her tale increased with each passing day from that first Resurrection Sunday. But nor can I imagine that Mary’s persistence decreased. Because just last Sunday, we shared in the joy of Mary’s witness.

In the book of John, it’s the women that get it done. It’s the women that make sure there’s a story to tell.

Sure, the woman at the well, the one we can’t even grace with a name, she had a few husbands in her past, and not that we’d bother to listen to her version of the story anyway...But wasn’t she the one whose witness helped an entire village to believe?

And we get so judgmental, we wonder how Mary of Bethany could pour out all of that fine anointing oil, make such a fuss over one dinner guest, offer such affectionate admiration...But isn’t her witness one of the reasons we know what it means to be in God’s presence?

And what about Mary and Martha, the good sisters of Lazarus? It’s their tears, their love, their grief, their friendship, their hospitality that brings out the most authentic humanity in Jesus, and it’s their faith and their belief that inspires Jesus to use his powers.

And this is to say nothing of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, who knew with all of her heart that her son was filled with God's love. Do you remember that Mary helped Jesus rescue a banquet with homemade wine, and that she stayed by his side until the bitter end? And I'm speculating here, but that she kept whispering in Peter and the others' ears long after that first Good Friday, "Don't forget what my son told you he was gonna do!"

Witness is not just a testament to the events of that first Easter morning; witness is also a willingness, an eagerness, a dogged determination to claim the historical event of God's resurrection as a catalyst for our own resurrections. Mary, and Mary, and Martha, and Mary, and an unnamed woman experienced the life, love, and reclamation of Jesus. Such an experience shaped their very beings. And even though the text doesn't tell us so (but it should by the way!), these women spent the remainder of their lives making sure that other people knew that this event could change their lives, too!

"Now, what, Bob, does any of this have to do with Psalm 16," you ask?

Well, I know many of you will associate this Psalm with David, or perhaps some other figure in the monarchical period of Israel. And that's certainly accurate.

But you know, Tim's got us doing this Midrash thing, where we're imagining the text, putting ourselves in between the verses, seeing if we can draw out new life and new meaning from ancient stories. And this morning, on the second Sunday of Easter, I'm not in a hurry to leave Miss Mary at the tomb.

I want to linger in community with Mary and the other strong women, whose lives Jesus so profoundly affected. I want to sit with them. I want to pray with them. I want to recount with them. I want to sing with them. I want to cry with them. I want to grieve with them. I want to rejoice with them. I want to share a meal with them. I want to walk with them. I want to laugh with them. I want to worship with them. I want to sit and be in awe of their witness. I want to try and process what we've seen.

I see these women in this morning's psalm. I hear these women in our psalm. The voice of this author is vulnerable yet confident. This person needs protection, but sees God as a reliable refuge. Perhaps our original psalmist is a warrior, pinned down in a precarious spot, or a prophet charged with telling an unpopular truth. "Things are tenuous," he says, "But God's gonna keep me steady."

I imagine these wonderful women feel the same way. Rome's patriarchy seeks to silence strong women, and it punishes vulnerable ones: just try finding income when you've no sons, nor siblings, nor husbands to support you, and the system thinks it untoward for you to earn a wage. And imagine how vulnerable you might feel when finally, a teacher who understands you most, who sees your value, who can look right into your heart, must move from this world to the next? And yes, that final goodbye, that realization that death is not the last word, it is comforting and oozing with joy, but the moment is fleeting, and how can a week have already passed? "It's tricky, but God's got us," these strong women say.

The original psalmist, a devoted and faithful person, stays the course. There's a covenant to keep. The world all around him seeks to cut corners, and little gods claim their little offerings, and there's a lot of

posturing to present false images of stability and security and even decency. “No thanks,” this psalmist says, “I’ll stick to what I know. I’ll stick to what is constant. I’ve got a cup that fills me up.”

I imagine Mary and the others saw a world seek to resume its normalcy not long after Easter. Both Rome and time march on after all. But it’s hard to un-see truth. So while the world sought to gain abundance in artificial things, these brave women simply lived the life abundant: community, bound in love and service, gathered at open banquets.

The psalmist knows the past, and the future, too. He hears God’s counsel, and he reckons it’s the same kind of spirit-filled, timely advice God has offered to his ancestors, and will offer to his descendants as well. And in this present moment, the psalmist need not be afraid, for God walks before him; there is a sturdiness, and he shall not be moved.

I picture the three Maries, Martha, and the unnamed woman sitting at a table together. Maybe they are sipping hot tea, or shucking peas, or playing Hearts, or sharing a really good bottle of wine. Regardless, they just need to be together. They just need to talk to one another. They just need to be heard. Mary, mother of Jesus, reflects on the whole story, from the moment she heard about her pregnancy to the end of her son’s life. And three and a half decades later, familiar words remain true:

“My soul magnifies the Lord,
47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
48 for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.” (Luke 1:47-49)

Finally, the psalmist takes comfort that a right path is illumined. God is not absent, God is present! And such presence is accompanied by lasting joy.

And I imagine it's Mary Magdalene's turn to speak now. She tells the other women, "When I finally got to the empty tomb, the angels said, 'He is not here.' And that must be so."

She points to the empty tomb.

"For how can our friend be there?" she asks.

Then she points back toward her heart.

"When we know our friend resides right here? And how can such a joy ever leave us when that joy resides in such an intimate place?"

Friends, the Easter candy's gone. And with last Sunday passed, we've yet to reclaim a new mile marker to distract us from COVID-19. The loud Hosannas of Palm Sunday seem to be giving way to the ughs and oomphs of monotonous social distancing routines. The restoration of Sabbath is losing its appeal; it appears one month without Caesar's fancy trappings is enough – why exchange your cross for a crown, when you can wait a few more weeks and the renewal of commerce will save your souls? Now that Jesus has risen, and Corona seem to be cresting, can't we just get back to doing ordinary things until Target starts selling Christmas Candy in August?

All of this is to say, that like the psalmist, and like the women of John's gospel, we find ourselves in a unique position: we are confident in God, joyous even. But we are vulnerable, too, perhaps even unsafe and

uncertain, and many around us are asking us to put our attention back on worldly things instead of divine things.

I think we find ourselves at a crucial moment in the life of our church, and of our world. We have an opportunity to stop viewing Easter as one event in history, and one liturgical celebration on our calendar. And we have the chance to view Easter, God's restorative, inclusive, affirming, ever-unfolding drama, Easter, as an event that's still happening to us right now, still shaping us right now, still connecting us to a God who is present with us always.

That's the God the psalmist clings to. That's the God Mary's story is telling us about. That's the God who has transformed the lives of strong women. That's the God who is transforming us, too, if only we'll let Her. That's the God for whom we have the chance to be a witness.

Protect me, O God, for in you, and only you, I take my refuge. I say to the Lord, 'You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you.'

Therefore my heart is glad, it swells, it is bursting at the seams, and my soul rejoices, it's singing a good song, ya'll, maybe not in tune or in key, but it's singing, y'all!!!

For God shows me, and you, (US!!!) the path of life.

God, in your presence there is fullness of joy; born out in a Zoom grid,
And in your right hand, there are the pleasures of people in community,
neighbors bound to YOU and to one another.

May it always, always, always be so!!! Amen.