

June 26, 2022

Psalm 16

A Faithful Direction

Prayer: God, you call us to go where Christ leads. Turn us from the ways of the world; guide us to fullness of joy in the Spirit, where bodies and souls rest secure; and grant us strength to follow the way of the cross, which frees us to love one another for the sake of all creation...

It's just a day. Like any other Sunday. End of June.

- Beautiful weather...
- This week the three mission trips with our young people and their advisors have returned. Some of them have changed. Some of them have changed for good.
- Associate Minister [Larissa Forsythe](#) is beginning her sabbatical.
- The church is shifting to its summer mode. One service at 9:30. Summer office hours means we're closed on Fridays.
- We celebrated Lis Davis' retirement at Music Director earlier this month, her last day on staff will be July 17.
- It's been almost a year since you celebrated Rev Allen's retirement following 33 years of ministry.

These are orientation points here at the church.

You'll have your own orientation points. The ages of the children in your family, the advice of your Dr at your last appointment, the way you remind yourself of doing what you want to do... maybe you have the voices of your own parents in your head, guiding, supporting...scolding? How we keep ourselves accountable.

Political orientation points this week are the repeal of Rowe V. Wade, the January 6 hearings, the war in Ukraine, events in Afghanistan...things affecting our refugee family.

I'd like to orient you to another voice in how we make plans and follow through – this is part of the human condition. Sometimes we do it well, sometimes we fail, but it's going on all the time – you plan a meal, you plan to get up at a certain time, you plan to meet someone, you plan to retire, you plan to save money, you plan to clean the house, you plan to get through the week. We lay plans, we live into them, and then when the future comes... it's just a day. Like any other day. You have the legacy of what has gone before that shapes the day you are in now, and you have an opportunity now, to shape the days ahead for yourself and for others. It's not quite time travel... but there's a certain power at work there.

Psalms are poetry in Hebrew. Many of them have been set to music as lyrics. In Hebrew the poetry is easier to remember than it is in English. Much of it rhymes or has other mnemonic

devices built in, like each line begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In the time of Jesus and long before and after, many Jews committed the psalms to memory. Since most of them were laborers that meant that while they were working with their hands, they could remember these words.

Psalm 16 is a Psalm of deep thanksgiving for a life that is lived in relationship to the divine. There was a time, not long ago, (maybe 40, 50 years ago) when everyone would have understood that. Today not so much. People are not born in this country to families necessarily believing in God; in homes where spirituality is cultivated. So as we listen, allow me to mark for you what a privilege it is to gather with others to consider our lives, strengths and weaknesses, limits and capacities in light of those who put themselves in relationships with the divine.

The psalmist says:

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

*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.
(meaning they will not engage in other religious practices worshiping other gods)
The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup;
you hold my lot.
The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
I have a goodly heritage.*

So interesting that the psalmist is celebrating their limits. It's okay, these boundary lines – for me – have fallen in pleasant places. A good heritage – from whatever came before in the mists of antiquity.

(This is not a statement about everyone, everywhere being well. Someone thousands of years ago, penned this personal prayer – these boundaries, these limits are a set of limits I have come into, to live with...I'm okay, I understand the limits of a human life, I'm giving God praise even with these limits. From within my limited capacities.)

*I bless the Lord, who gives me counsel;
in the night also my heart instructs me.
I keep the Lord always before me;
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.*

We have boundaries, boundaries in pleasant places. God is before me; God is at my right hand. I'm very struck by all of the directional language in this psalm. God is before me; God is to my right. Sounds like you're lining up a pathway forward like a sailor using a sextant and compass, or someone on the long trail using her GPS app. In ancient navigation you need two points of orientation. On the open ocean with a sextant, you can use the time of day as one point of data, the sun or the north star as the other. Or a compass. If you are

driving in your car today you may be using your GPS, but you also read the street signs to navigate.

The imagery of direction is of orienting themselves in the light of God's love, to determine the path forward.

Points of navigation:

- God is love; **And** we are to love our neighbor as ourselves
- God created the world and called it good; **And** each of us are part of that creation
- Remember the poor; **And** remember the words of Jesus: "as you have done for the least of these, so you have done to me." (Mat 25:40)

After worship today, we will be hearing feedback from the Cottage meetings that happened during Lent in March/April. The Transition Team has been thoughtfully reviewing the materials and preparing a short presentation and a time for Q and A. We hope to continue the conversations about:

- o Who are we?
- o Who is God calling us to be?
- o Who is our neighbor?

Honest answers to these questions are an important orientation point as we continue our leadership transition journey in the life of South Church. While we may not solve every problem or move in all the directions that people name and value, taking the time to listen. Listen to each other, listen to how God has shaped us already, listen to what has changed because of the change in leadership and because of the pandemic, which is our context, listen for what the opportunities are now.

And this is where it is so important to allow ourselves to be oriented by the Spirit of God, from where we stand today. If you are navigating a path or long journey, each time you navigate needs to be from where you presently stand, that is navigation needs to be current. If you continue to navigate from the trailhead, even when you are halfway through, you'll get your lefts and rights mixed up, bridges and water bodies will not be oriented to where you are now.

It is God's deepest desire to go with us in our lives. God argued against building a Temple and having Kings over Israel. God wanted to stay nimble, to move among God's people, to be carried in a portable tabernacle; to be a God who lends direction to our real lives, whose love engages our decisions, our actions – in the day to day.

I'm going to invite you this morning to orient yourself to where God is in your life right now. On a shelf? Under a rug? Is God stuck in this building? Wherever you have encountered

God, invite God to orient you in the new spaces you enter. God went on the Mission trips, God was invited there.

The psalmist said it:

I bless the Lord, who gives me counsel;

in the night also my heart instructs me.

I keep God always before me;

because God is at my right hand, I shall not be moved (Psalm 16: 7-8)

On a day like any other day; the sweetest thing is to walk in a faithful direction.

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