

Bellaire Community United Methodist Church

March 26, 2017

“Absolutely Not Abandoned”

Series of Psalms (Lent) – part 4

Psalm 16

I hope you all had as good of a week as I did. I want to start by thanking Dave Ciganick for preaching last Sunday. It is a blessing as a pastor to have willing leaders like him. The youth group had a fantastic time at Spring Splash. One hundred ninety people experienced great worship, a keynote speaker, a comedian, and of course, all the fun in the water park. My favorite “water ride” was the hot tub!

Speaking of young people, I want to remind all you parents and grandparents out there that it is never too early to sign up for summer camp. The early bird deadline for Lake Louise is March 31st, and you can save \$25 by signing up now. Last year we sent over 25 kids to camp, and our church covered a large portion of that. Any money that we can save on registration allows us to cast our net wider. I have all the forms here, so if you need help, please see me after the service.

Let’s take a moment and pray together as we prepare to experience God’s Word.

Thank you, O God, for this day. We are your people, gathered together as the Body of Christ, the church, because we need you. We need your love. We need your grace. We need your encouragement and challenge to be the church you have called us to be. Do not let us slip into complacency or apathy, God, but let us experience the resurrection of Jesus Christ anew. Help us to hear this story, centuries old, like we are hearing it for the very first time, and to share it with

others. Compel us to live lives that give you glory. In Jesus' name we pray.
Amen.

We are continuing a study of the psalms as we journey through Lent towards Easter. The last few weeks we have discussed how the Psalms are like the hymn-and-prayer book of the Bible. These are the very words that Jesus sang and prayed. And the Psalms cover a wide range of emotions, from joy to anger to sorrow to fear. It's kind of like an ice cream store – except that there are more than 32 flavors of psalms. So far, we've looked at psalms of praise, royal psalms, and psalms about studying God's law. Today's "flavor of the day" is confidence.

Confidence psalms are expressions of trust in God. They are marked by an unshakable belief in God as our protector. A sense of security dominates the confidence psalms, with a minimal emphasis on any suffering the psalmist might be experiencing. In the confidence psalms we find some of the most memorable metaphors for God, such as shepherd (Ps 23), mother bird (Ps 91), rock and fortress (Ps 18), and stronghold and light (Ps 27). Words such as safety, shelter and rescue express certainty in God's protection.

So what do we mean by the word "confidence"? Confidence is the feeling you have when you just know something is going to happen – usually something good. It's kind of like faith, but stronger. "I am confident something will happen," sounds bolder than "I have faith something will happen."

A lack of confidence is debilitating. I remember playing in pony league baseball when I was a kid. I had no confidence at all. I never got a hit all season. I can't even remember hitting a foul ball. I'm certain that I was so scared, I never swung the bat. Having no confidence is lousy.

But when you have confidence, it's contagious. You feel great, even before the outcome of a certain situation. It's March – and you want to be confident that your basketball team is going to win. When you are sick, you want to be confident that you will recover. But most importantly, if you are a Christian, you want to be confident in the God whom you follow.

Do you feel confident right now? The bible tells us that having confidence is a choice. Let's look at Psalm 16 and see what this psalmist was choosing. (For the sake of my sermon, I'm going to assume the author was King David.)

Verse 1 tells us David found his refuge in God. God kept David safe. A lot of us are concerned with safety. We want to know the safety ratings of our cars. We buckle up when we drive. We lock our doors, maybe even have alarm systems. We want our banks to keep our money safe, our schools to keep our children safe.

But the reality is that those things can fail. It is only God who keeps us safe, not people or things. This week, I got caught in an online scam for the first time in my life. I thought I was so safe with my purchases, but I made a mistake. Thankfully, it only cost me about \$6, but it still rocked my sense of security. See, we need to listen to David's words – God is the only 100% safe guarantee.

David goes on to say he has chosen God, who alone is good. I love how this thought is echoed in the New Testament in James 1:17. "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights..." Is that your standard of goodness? Is God alone your good? If so, you know that all of your treasures are worthless compared to the goodness of God.

David complains about those who have not chosen God as their good. The meaning of verses 3 and 4 is actually debated. David is contrasting himself to

those who worship other gods, but they might be foreigners, or they might be leaders of Israel who have succumbed to idolatry. Either way, he points to those who reject God and says, “No way. That’s never going to be me.”

There are so many good reasons to choose God. God sustains us – David gives us an image of a portion and cup (v. 5). Have you been out to eat lately? I ate at a Mexican restaurant in Dewitt on Wednesday night. It was late, almost 8:00 by the time we arrived, and I was famished. And I was hoping that the portions were going to be hefty, and I was not dismayed. It was one of those meals when you indulge a little too much, and instead of walking away from the table, you sort of roll out the door. I was full. I was satisfied. It was a good portion of chimichanga! That’s what David is saying about God. God fills us with things that last. Material blessings can be from God, but more important to me are things like love, encouragement, forgiveness and purpose. Those are filling to our souls!

I love verse 7, which says “Even at night my heart instructs me.” I want to tell you, Wednesday night, my stomach had a few things to instruct me about my meal. But have you ever had a night when you worried so much, you couldn’t sleep? Do you know the feeling in your heart when you have the absence of peace? David chose God – and his heart kept beating a rhythm of love and peace all night long. This is why memorizing scripture and mediating on God’s Word is so powerful – our hearts speak to us, even in our sleep, of the goodness of God.

Notice, too, in verse 8, there are other parts of David’s body involved in his confidence. He keeps his eyes always on the Lord – his gaze is fixed on God. When you are driving, you know you tend to go in the direction you are looking. This is why distracted driving is so dangerous. If you see something on the side

that catches your attention, you drift that way. Faith is similar: if you keep your eyes on God, you follow God. If you take your eyes off of God, you drift.

Confidence just oozes out of this psalm. But the most important part of this passage is found in verses 9 and 10. Let's read them again.

"Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay."

Does that remind you of the Easter story? It should. In Acts, chapter 2, and again in Acts 13, Peter and Paul quote this psalm. They both believed that King David wrote this passage exclusively about Jesus, the holy one, who was not abandoned to death, the one who found the path of life. This, one of the oldest psalms in the Bible, was a prophecy about Jesus' resurrection.

This part is absolutely crucial to us. At every funeral I've ever preached, I have stated that Christians have no fear of death. How is that possible? Because we believe in a Savior who conquered death. The basic Christian message is that Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God, loves us so much, that he died for our sins, but through the power of God, Jesus rose again on Easter morning. That is a bold, life-changing message. It is no wonder that Peter and Paul and others have staked their lives on the confidence that they had in Jesus Christ.

The truth is, we can all have that confidence, no matter what is happening in our lives. In 1st Peter 5:7 and Psalm 55:22, we find the command to cast all of our anxieties and burdens on the Lord, because he cares for us. Do we do that? Or do we think that somehow we can conquer our fears and carry our burdens on our own? We have no confidence in God when we believe that we can solve all our problems on our own.

I admit, placing your full trust in God is scary. Having confidence in your rescue is not a natural thing. A few years ago, I took my youth group on a white-water rafting trip down the Cumberland River in Kentucky. It was beautiful, but you have to know, it rained hard for an entire week before our trip. So the river was about twice as high and fast as normal. And at one point, we shot the rapids with confidence that was misplaced. The moment is etched in my mind. The guide yelled, "Paddle hard right...Paddle hard left...Paddle back! Aghh!" And we hit a huge boulder head on, throwing all but two people from the raft. I crashed into the water, not knowing which way was up, and I stayed under at least 30 seconds. When my head popped up, I was in the middle of a raging river, and I couldn't see anyone. Not the raft, not my youth group, not my 60-year-old dad who was riding with us. Nobody. Just wicked looking rocks coming closer.

At that moment, I had a choice whom I was going to trust: my puny swimming abilities, or my God, who created the river. I took a breath, relaxed, and floated on my back until I was out into calmer water. It was freaky. I felt by all rights that I should have died. In fact, my dad had a worse experience than I, and we had a hard time talking about it later. But in that moment, I believed that God would save me. And God did.

I am not here promising that everyone gets everything that they want when they trust God. That's not how it works. God is not some giant vending machine to do our bidding. Rather, what God is asking us is, "Do you have confidence in me?" Sometimes our greatest struggle is to let go. To float on our backs, spiritually speaking, and rest in the safety of the Lord. You will only have confidence in God when you finally realize that you cannot do anything for the Lord in your own power and strength. I don't care if you can bench press 400

pounds – none of us can fight our battles and win on our own. We must say, “Keep me safe, my God, for in you [alone] I take refuge.”

I went to the One Eighty Church Turnaround Conference last week. What I heard there concerned me – it is a struggle to be a pastor in a declining denomination. 90% of churches in America are plateaued or declining. And yes, that does include us. I realize that. But if I approach this calling, thinking it is under my own power that our church will experience resurrection, I am woefully mistaken, as are we all. A pastor cannot and should not save a church. There are a dozen other things that can – Jesus can save a church. Prayer can save a church. Forgiveness can save a church. Confidence in the Lord can save a church. In the end, God didn’t call people to save the church – God has called the church to save people. We must recognize that God has placed us here in this community to make it better. We must have confidence that we are only instruments guided by God’s hand. We can be confident and work hard to ensure this church is part of God’s kingdom in eternity if we completely surrender ourselves to the Savior, Jesus Christ.

Read verse 11 with me again. “You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.” Do you want to know that joy? Do you want to know eternal pleasures? I am telling you the truth – this pathway to life is only found by following Jesus. There is no other way.

May God bless us all with the confidence that King David had, and may that confidence change our lives, our church, our community, and our world.

Memory verse

Psalm 16:8 -“I have set the Lord always before me. Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.”

Reflection questions

1. How confident are you in our own abilities? What is your greatest strength?
2. What is your current greatest fear? How do you face it?
3. Do you have a fear of death? What does Jesus' resurrection say about the power of death over us?
4. What would it mean for you to have complete confidence in God? What would this look like in your life? What practical steps can you take to show Jesus your confidence in him alone?