Psalm 16 (ESV)

Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge. I say to the Lord, “You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you.”

3 As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight.

4 The sorrows of those who run after another god shall multiply; their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names on my lips.

5 The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot.

6 The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.

7 I bless the Lord who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me.

8 I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.

9 Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure.

10 For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see the pit.

11 You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Psalm 16 (ESV)
I am so grateful that last week, even though we had to hold Easter services online, we were not prevented from experiencing once again the previously recorded “Hallelujah” chorus from Handel’s Messiah, sung by our magnificent choir and directed by our own Jeff Faux. It was awesome! For me, this is not only an inspiring work of musical genius that appeals to and uplifts our emotions, but every time I hear Handel’s work, I realize that it was a profound expression of faith that somehow captures the cosmic change that took place in our universe. Certainly, the world would never be the same after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As Handel wrote in his “Hallelujah” chorus: [Jesus, the] “King of Kings, and Lord of lords … shall reign for ever and ever.”

For humankind, that changed everything! The nature of all that is was put in its proper perspective that first Easter Sunday when Mary Magdalena first encountered the Risen Christ. Everything required reinterpretation. Nothing was the same for us, once we truly embraced and truly encountered for ourselves the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The understanding of reality itself was completely transformed: how we understand life and death, joy and suffering, beauty and ugliness; how we understand who we are, why we are here, life’s purpose; how we deal with life’s challenges; how we relate to one another. All must be reinterpreted in light of this miracle of the death and resurrection of God’s Son.

This includes how we understand God’s Word, which at the time of the first Easter is what we now call the Old Testament. It is not that God’s Word has changed, but that we can better understand more completely what God had been revealing all along. Sometimes Christians try to read the Old Testament on its own, but we really cannot separate ourselves and read it without wearing our “Christian glasses” because everything has been reinterpreted in light of the fact that God came to this earth in the person of Jesus. He revealed things to us so we could better understand what was taught in the Old Testament.
Pastor Su read for us a perfect resurrection psalm, Psalm 16. This is credited to King David and gives us what I like to think of as seven stanzas of truth. To sum it up, we could say that it affirms that the One Almighty God will not abandon our souls. Rather, He redeems us, He strengthens us, He guides us, and He blesses us; what a wonderful assurance during a time just such as this current pandemic crisis. It is what Easter is all about! As a matter of fact, the Apostle Peter quoted this psalm in his Pentecost sermon—it has that much relevance to the idea of New Life.

Though we separated ourselves because of our sin from our just and loving God, and though in us His image has been corrupted by that sin, our gracious heavenly Father did not reject us. He did not leave us alone, mired in fear and struggle, lost and separated from Him, forever facing eternal death. Instead, He paid the price that we owed. He died in our place. He suffered unspeakable pain, the consequences of our sin, in our place. You realize, we should have been on that cross! That is what we deserved, and that is why we sing that wonderful old spiritual, *Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?* Hopefully, your answer is an emphatic, “Yes, I was there! We were all there in Him, because that was meant for us!” By rising again, Jesus confirmed that God’s justice was satisfied. He said from the cross, “It is finished” (John 19:30). He accomplished our atonement.

When I hear Handel’s masterpiece being sung, I am reassured that He gained a new life for us in this world as well as in the next. A God like that would not abandon us now. How appropriate that David began his psalm with these verses: “Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge. I say to the Lord, ‘You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you’” (Psalm 16:1-2).

Whenever I hear words in Scripture such as pleas to preserve and protect us or “God is our refuge,” I remember the very first time my parents put me in charge of our home and watching over my little sister because they were going to be away for a night or two. It was a different world back then, and I was certainly old enough to take on the responsibility for the very first time, but I tell you that I
did not get a wink of sleep that night! I was upstairs in my room and I heard every little sound, whether it was the floor creaking when the heat came on or the sound outside as a vehicle went by. My mind started playing games with me and I started thinking that someone was trying to sneak into the house. It was then I realized how much I had taken my sense of security for granted; that I could be in my bed blissfully sleeping because I knew my mother and my father were downstairs and if anything happened they would take care of it. Now they were not there, and I was terrified.

I also remember when, as a much smaller child, I had gotten lost in a big department store when I had wandered away while I was looking at all the wonders around me. I will always remember the feeling of terror at being alone. Fortunately, I had the good sense to go up to one of the clerks and say that I was lost. Over the loudspeaker I heard a request for a Mr. or Mrs. Grant, and the moment I heard my mother’s voice I knew everything was going to be all right.

That is what David is talking about in his psalm: “refuge.” It is as if you are a little child and you can run up and jump into the lap of your mother or father and they will envelop you in their loving arms and keep you secure. The Lord’s prayer starts very formally, “Our Father,” but in Aramaic the word is “Abba,” which is more like our “Daddy.” There is an intimacy, a closeness, like being in our father’s lap with his arms around us. If you did not experience this as a child, you can experience it now because that is the God we have. He is the One to whom we have access while we are enveloped in His loving, protective arms.

Verse two reminds me of a song that we often sing in church called “The Doxology,” which begins, “Praise God from Whom all blessings flow.” David says, “I have no good apart from you” (Psalm 16:2). He acknowledges that all good gifts that we enjoy are gifts from His benevolent hand. We are not entitled to any them, yet we take our many blessings for granted. If we tried each day to list every single blessing that we experience from the very first thing in the morning the list would be endless. It is impossible for us to name all
of our blessings! How true it is when David says in Psalm 23:6 that “goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.” Sometimes we get so focused on the trouble at hand that we fail to see all the blessings, goodness and mercy that surround us.

Speaking of good gifts, David goes on in verse three which begins the second stanza, “As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight.” David’s fellow Israelites are worthy of mention because he takes delight in them. He considers them as numbering among his best blessings. Speaking for all my colleagues who are scattered around the room at this moment, we as your pastors feel exactly the same way. We are all feeling how difficult it is to be shepherds when we do not have direct access to our flock. Nevertheless, this crisis has caused us to feel even more intensely how much we love you and miss you. It is not just affection, although it certainly does include that as we have great affection for you; it is more than that because of the common bond we have in Christ Jesus. That is a bond like no other. We have a common bond with brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ all around the globe, with people we do not know and have never seen.

I remember an incredible experience on one of our Israel trips. We were coming out of the historic part of Capernaum as another group of Christians was coming in. They were from Nigeria, all beautifully dressed in very bright colors, and they approached us with big smiles. I asked to meet their pastor, and within moments he was praying for me and I was praying for him. They started singing for us and then a few of them came over to our people and they started dancing. We had a great time! Why? Because in that moment, although we had never seen each other before and were all in a foreign country, we recognized that we were brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ and that was a bond. It was a beautiful time! If we Christians could keep that in the forefront of our minds and our hearts, that same kind of love will spill out for all people without any effort whatsoever. Jesus, the Risen Christ, wants us to look at all people the way He does. As His disciples, we must value them, treasure them, and cherish them as He does.
Early in their history, the Israeli Defense Forces were always greatly outnumbered by the opposition who had more supplies, more tanks, and more planes. They had a saying: “We win only with what we have.” Although we are not all in the same room, we have the miracle of technology and a wonderful staff who know how to do things so we can stay connected. We are very grateful for the miracle of technology that enables us to stay connected, but it is nothing like seeing and being with one another in person. That day will come. Know that you are your pastors’ delight and that we miss you and look forward to the day when we will be back together again. During this time, may you feel the same way toward your brothers and sisters in Christ. May we look deep into our hearts and reclaim the profound sense of love that we have for each other, especially during times like this.

In the third stanza, David reminds us of the temptation to embrace other gods, which is very real in this world, and he warns us of the futility of it. Psalm 16:4 says, “The sorrows of those who run after another god shall multiply; their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names on my lips.” He means that there are many idols in this world vying for our attention and our commitment, and that there are unintended consequences if they are allowed to take first place in our hearts. After the Resurrection of Jesus, what could possibly compete with our blessings?

Nothing satisfies like the redeeming love of our sweet Savior. When we put all things second to Him, when we put Him first at all times and in all circumstances we can put other things in their proper perspective, both good and bad. David is so convinced of the dangerous trap of idolatry that he says he will pay no homage to other priorities that would potentially multiply his troubles. In fact, he will not even talk about them or let them be on his lips. What God is doing through David is challenging us to ask ourselves what or who we ultimately trust; what or who we ultimately depend upon. From where does our hope come? What has taken priority in our lives?
In Psalm 121:1 David asks the same question. “I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come?” Answer that question, not in the way you think I want you to or in the way you want other Christians to hear but honestly, just between you and Almighty God. What is your answer? Not just theoretically, but by our day-by-day actions, by our emotions, by our attitudes. Do our lives reflect the trust that is genuinely in our hearts?

The fourth stanza is very personal to me. This has been an area of my spiritual growth for a very long time. Psalm 16:5-6 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.” David is referring to the time when the tribes of Israel divided the Promised Land; each tribe got a certain portion and each family got their particular lot. People tend to reflect on their lot in life. Where were the lines drawn? What did they get as opposed to what someone else got?

We might find ourselves questioning the course of our own lives. Why did things go as they did? Why did we have this opportunity and not that opportunity? Why did we have wealth or lack it? Why were those particular obstacles in our lives? Why is our health as it is, or our social or professional circumstance? We might ask “why, why, why” in the same way we might be inclined to sing along with Tevye from Fiddler on the Roof when he sang the final lines of If I Were a Rich Man:

Lord, who made the lion and the lamb,
You decreed I should be what I am
Would it spoil some vast, eternal plan,
If I were a wealthy man?

David recognizes the sovereignty of God who works His purpose in our lives, sometimes in ways that have absolutely nothing to do with us. In trusting God’s purpose David declares that his inheritance is delightful. Even if we embrace the thought that God is working out His purpose in our lives, the circumstances and the people with whom we deal, we might be tempted to say along with
Tevye, “Lord, I know that we are the Chosen People, but once in a while could you choose somebody else?” Indeed, Lord, why me?

Once again, when we encounter the Risen Christ we realize that, above all, Jesus is our life! That is why David wrote in verse five, “The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup…” The Holy Spirit enables us to freely choose Him, which is what “born again” means. The Holy Spirit transforms us from the inside out so that the Lord becomes the desire of our heart and we freely choose Him. We can be dead in our sins with no way to reach Almighty God, but through the Holy Spirit, Jesus freely becomes the desire of our hearts. David wrote, “…you are my chosen portion and my cup” [which overflows, by the way—David said that, too!]. See how this puts everything else in proper perspective? God will walk the road with us through whatever we need to face. Ultimately, we have an inheritance that is delightful because that inheritance is Him. Since He is our life, He will be the One to whom we listen.

So, in the fifth stanza, David says, “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” (Psalm 16:7-8). It is interesting that David mentions the night. Have you ever experienced a restless, sleepless night? After going through the day when you face and handle challenges, you go to bed and as the night closes in your thoughts wander, anxieties grow, your mind races and you cannot get to sleep. Then the sun comes up in the morning and you feel better and ready to take on another day. As Psalm 50:5 says, “Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes in the morning.” By contrast, David listens to God in the night. God is before him and in his heart; He counsels him so that he is not shaken. David keeps his eyes on the Lord.

Remember in Matthew 14 when Peter tried to walk on the water? During a storm, Jesus was walking across the water and called to Peter to come out onto the water. Peter obeyed and started walking toward Him! But when Peter started considering the storm and took his eyes off Jesus, he immediately sank down into the water. Jesus
can strengthen us to do things we never thought we could do if we keep our eyes on Him. It so exemplifies the Crucifixion and bears witness to the fact that when we keep our eyes on the Lord, even as we are passing through “the valley of the shadow of death” (Psalm 23:4), even as we are passing through Good Friday, Easter Sunday comes! Because He is in our lives, we can have joy in our hearts and even rest in the night in peace.

Jesus promised that He will come Himself and take us to be where He is. David said, “Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol or let your holy one see the pit” (Psalm 16:9-10). There are many I want to see when the Lord brings me home. Yes, I want to see my parents and I want to see my brother David, my friend John, and my Uncle Paul. Certainly, if my dear wife precedes me, I will want to see her, but the One I want to see more than any other is my Lord Jesus. As we were reminded last week, as we close our eyes for the last time in this life and we reopen them in the next, we will look upon the face of our Lord Jesus. Could there be anything more magnificent than that? That is the promise we have in Jesus.

We come now to the seventh and final stanza were David anticipates the joy of heaven. “You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm16:11). The Risen Lord is the path of Life, and we see in this glimpse of heaven that in His presence there is a fullness of complete and total joy. Truly our limited minds cannot even begin to conceive what that must be like.

I have come to earnestly believe and trust that trouble in this fallen world is only another opportunity to see the hand of God at work. Jesus Christ has already won the victory. At all times, in all places and in all circumstances of life, especially in times like these, it is well for us to commit our lives—body, mind, heart and soul—to our Lord Jesus Christ. Trust in Him above all things, embrace Him as your Savior and Sovereign Lord, for the joy of everlasting life in His presence is the promise to all who will but trust in Him.