

Introduction:

- A. I suppose it was v.1 that caught my attention almost 22 years ago. “Keep me safe, my God, for in you I take refuge.” As I’ve shared with you recently, coming to this church turned out to be a very scary time. There were simmering conflicts. People didn’t trust each other. Others were disheartened. Finances were precarious. People were leaving. My very first Sunday I found myself having to arbitrate a serious split. So you see what I mean. “*Keep me safe, my God, for in you I take refuge.*”

Then last April I sort of meandered into that Psalm again, just as I was facing a different kind of apprehension—not a fear, exactly, but the unsettling prospect of retiring. Again it became my prayer: “*Keep me safe, my God, for in you I take refuge.*” Over the past months I’ve returned to this psalm over and over. I’ve written all over the margins in my Bible and more in my journal. It’s my treasure.

Ps. 16 is precious to so many people because we all need this prayer: “Keep me safe, my God, for in you I take refuge.” Turn to Psalm 16.

- B. There are many psalms that give us prayer language for our times of trouble. This is one of them. Here it is as if David walks into Israel’s National Archives and opens God’s covenant with Israel, the promises God has made to his people. In v.2 he lays out his **declaration of dependence**: “*I say to the LORD [Yahweh, the covenant name that guaranteed his promises], ‘You are my Lord [addonai, God]; apart from you I have no good thing.*” There’s no point in looking anywhere else for safety. There’s an old song that said, “*Where could I go, O where could I go?*”

Seeking a refuge for my soul.” “Apart from you, LORD, I have no good thing.”

- C. Often when we pray for safety we want God to make the danger or the suffering go away. But here, this man of God **prays himself into the refuge of God**. David carries his fears into God’s covenant the way someone whose home is invaded retreats to a hidden safe room in their house. When we say to God, *“in you I take refuge,”* pray your way into this safe room.

First, David anchors his prayer in his identity as a son of Israel, the people of God, entrusted with the God’s covenant. It’s as if David reminds himself: *Why should I be afraid! I’m an Israelite. We are the people of the living God. What can anyone do to harm us!?* This is our heritage as well because through Jesus we’ve been adopted into Israel. In **vv.3-6** David says...

I. TAKE REFUGE IN YOUR GOD-GIVEN BIRTHRIGHT

- When we are born again, we are born into the covenant care of God. It is our birthright and comes with two strong protections:
- A. **Vv.3-4**: *“I say of the holy people who are in the land, ‘They are the noble ones in whom is all my delight.’”* In order to silence my fears, I will delight in the company of the people who delight in God. *Illus.*: I specifically remember thinking about this verse all those years ago. On my very first Sunday I had seen some very disheartening behavior. I wondered just what kind of people I had to deal with. But still, in those first weeks I read these words and they encouraged me greatly. *There are holy people here, I thought. Noble, splendid, high-born people of God who will help keep me safe and be the delight of my life*. And you have.

God's people, of course, are *not* always safe. We become dangerous when we stop being holy. We stop being noble when we stoop to the behavior of spiritual ragamuffins. We are all capable and, indeed, we have all been guilty, of being *unsafe, unholy, ignoble*. Listen carefully: **Just as it was 22 years ago, a congregation in transition is prone to complaining, comparing, gossiping, and second-guessing leaders.** Don't be like that!

David contrasts God's holy people with unbelievers in v.4, "*Those who run after other gods will suffer more and more. I will not pour out libations of blood to such gods or take up their names on my lips.*" It's another way of saying to God, "*Apart from you I have no good thing.*" Don't hedge your bets when you're afraid. Don't have some back-up plan in case God doesn't come through for you

We are not supposed to face our fears all alone. Part of our birthright is *our holy people*, our congregation, our brothers and sisters in Christ; our peeps. *The Message* puts v.3, "*These God-chosen lives all around—what splendid friends they make!*" When we feel threatened God's holy people can surround us like a phalanx of soldiers. They come alongside to encourage and pray, they enfold us in their affection. They tell us their stories of God's faithfulness and have us join them in the songs of grace. Oh, I have felt your protection, your prayers, your love, your wisdom and grace in some very dark hours. You have been "*all my delight.*" "***What splendid friends you make!***"

Illus.: On one of my Quiet Thursdays last spring I was meditating on this Psalm, and this verse in particular. The church was mostly quiet. There was a women's group at the other end of the building but I couldn't hear them. As I sat there, absorbed in meditating on these words, I heard a

faint melody being played on a piano. Nobody is ever around on Thursday to play the piano. I didn't know that Margo was practicing to play for the ladies' program. Then I thought, "*What is that tune??*" It was familiar but I couldn't place it. Gradually I remembered and I actually wondered if an angel was playing.

*Sometimes not often enough
We reflect upon the good things
And those thoughts always center
Around those we love
And I think about those people
Who mean so much to me
And for so many years have made me
So very happy
And I count the times I have forgotten
To say thank you
And just how much I love them.* [Felice & Henry Mancini]

God had synched up that Carpenters song with this psalm.

So when you are praying for safety take refuge in your God-given birthright. And that means that you will delight in the company of the people who delight in God.

B. The second assurance of our birthright is in Vv.5-6:

*LORD, you alone are my portion and my cup;
you make my lot secure.*

*The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
surely I have a delightful inheritance.*

To settle your fears, delight in your God-given inheritance.

When God brought the Israelites into the Promised Land each of tribes received an allotment of land. Except for the Levites. Josh 18:7 explains, "*But to the tribe of Levi, Moses had given no inheritance; the LORD, the God*

of Israel, is their inheritance, as he promised them.” Here David identifies with them.

“Yahweh, you alone are my portion.” My allotment. My homeplace. Serving you is home enough for me. Can you say that? Remember the song: *“In this fearful, fallen world I will be your home.”* *“Apart from you, I have no good thing.”*

“Yahweh, you are ...my cup.” Imagine someone putting a cup before you, filled with a mysterious drink. To drink it, whether it is good or bad, will determine your future. The Bible speaks of the cup of judgment and also of the cup of salvation. Here God himself is our cup. To drink of the LORD is to *take in* the Lord. Jesus had this same kind of thing in mind when he told us, *“This cup is the new covenant in my blood.”*

“You make my lot secure.” This phrase has the sense: *Lord, not only have you been generous to me, but you also manage all those resources so my future is secure.* These threats that frighten me cannot rob me of my inheritance because you guard all you have given me. Our treasure, after all, is laid up for us in heaven.

Then a kind of recap, *“The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance.”* Illus.: Last March when I began my Lenten exercise of fasting and prayer, I came to my first Quiet Thursday unsure of just what to do. I sat there in my office, and told God I didn’t quite know what to do next—where to read, or what to listen for, or how to pray. I actually expected that God would have some stern words for me. So I sat in the quiet and, without really thinking about it, I found myself watching scenes from my life—all different short scenes from all the different seasons, all instances

where God had taken care of me, or taught me, or blessed me. I was caught up in this, watching my life flash before my eyes, without death looming! And then, like the last line of a movie, this phrase: *“The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places.”* It was such a God-kissed hour; a kind of quiet rapture, sweet glimpses of my *delightful inheritance*.

So first take refuge in your God-given birthright—God’s holy people and your delightful inheritance. Now the second part of Psalm says this:

II. TAKE REFUGE IN GOD’S PRESENCE

- A. Remember, this is a prayer for safety. When we are afraid one part of that is thinking, *“I just don’t know what to do.”* So **v.7**: *“I will praise the LORD, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me.”* **Praise the LORD! In my troubles God counsels me day and night.** This is such a wonderful gift, such a help to the fearful.

Moses summed up one of the great benefits of God’s covenant with his people in Deut 4:7, *“What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him?”* **Ps. 119:105,** *“Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.”* God says in **Ps. 91,** *“He will call on me, and I will answer him.”* God does not always speak at our cue. Often he waits in silence until we are quiet and humble enough to hear, but God is never unwilling to counsel his frightened people.

“Even at night,” which I suspect not only means when the stars are out but when life itself is a dark place. *“Even at night my heart [where God whispers] instructs me.”*

- B. Not only do we have God's ever-ready counsel, but we also have him beside us, strong and mighty. V.8, "I keep my eyes always on the LORD." Instead of looking wild-eyed this way and that I'm going to look to Jesus! Focus on Jesus by reading the Bible, by praying, by singing, by worshiping with God's people and hearing God's word.

Illus.: I saw a *New Yorker* cartoon of a man talking with his doctor. She says, "*I see, and have you tried worrying about it?*" As Dr. Phil would say, "*How's that working for you?*" Stop playing the video you've created for your future catastrophe. Stop playing your fears over and over. Open your Bible and look at Jesus! Look at our mighty God.

"With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken."

Your right hand is your strong hand, your fighting hand. But that's the problem: my right hand is weak. Praying is how I draw up close enough to Jesus for him to fight my battles. We used to sing, "*What have I to fear? What have I to dread? Leaning on the everlasting arms.*"

- C. So thanks to God's presence I always have his **counsel** and I always have his **strength** at my side. Why, even this old decaying body is secure when God is with me. Vv.9-10:

*"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."

Man, that's an Easter text! In fact, in a sermon in Acts 13, Paul applied it to the resurrection of Jesus. It was *his* body that did not decay so *our* bodies will not remain forever in the realm of the dead. **We are so safe, that not even these bodies are in danger!**

Illus.: We buried our brother, Don Hahn, yesterday. We stood out there at All Saints Cemetery and I said those sober words: “*Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.*” But make no mistake: that is *not* Don’s final resting place! We are confident that not only is he with the Lord right now, but that his **body** will rise, new and immortal, “*in that great gittin’ up morning. Fare thee well, fare thee well!*”

- D. So if God is with us, if he counsels us and protects us, even guarantees that these decaying bodies will rise again, we can take refuge in this final three-part promise in v.11:
1. “*You make known to me the path of life;*” We stand trembling and peering into the dark unknown. We ask God for safety, and he says, “*I will show you the safe way.*” The path of righteousness on which he leads us is not only safe, but the very journey is life-giving. To walk with the Lord is to live.
 2. “*You will fill me with joy in your presence.*” We come into this prayer trembling but as we pray these assurances the burdens lift. And with those assurances comes relief, trust, peace-- **joy!** Right here and now. **Teilhard de Chardin** said, “*Joy is the most infallible sign of the presence of God.*” And if we know that joy now, we cannot even imagine the perpetual joy of heaven!
 3. “*With eternal pleasures at your right hand.*” Illus.: I saw that in Don Hahn’s membership application from a couple of years ago he said that one of his favorite things at VCL was “*the Holy Communion Service which is really uplifting and a joyous experience.*” Well, wait till he sits down at the Wedding Supper of the Lamb!

Wait till he sees the Holy City coming down out of heaven from God.

Wait till we see our bridal city's bejeweled foundations and her gates open to the splendors of the nations.

Wait till we see the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb, and the tree of life bearing fruit for the healing of the nations.

Wait till we see the throne of God and the Lamb, till we see his face and find his name on our foreheads.

Conclusion

Psalms need to be internalized to be useful. It's not enough to read them. They are meant to become our prayers, our songs.

I have been over this psalm again and again, rising to its truth, to trust the refuge in God that it promises.

Like I said, I suppose it was **v.1** that caught my attention almost 22 years ago when I was so afraid. "*Keep me safe, O God, for in you I take refuge.*" In the margin of my old Bible from those days, by this psalm, I wrote, "*2/98 great encouragement in a time of change & stress.*"

I hope you will add it to your repertoire.