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Series: Summer In the Psalms  
Theme: Thanksgiving  
Text: Psalm 16  
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## Opening Question

What is your story? It's one of the best questions we can ask!

## Intro

One night, it was stormy out as the father went to put his children to bed. The lightning in the sky shot frightening flashes of blazing brightness across their bedroom walls as the thunder clapped in unpredictable and dreadful tones. Even the family dog seemed undone by the storm and howled anxiously with every peel of thunder. Mama and Papa were unmoved by the storm, perhaps even enjoying the comfort of seeing its splendor and majesty from the safety of their home. But, Mama and Papa also had lived long enough to know that storms are good and necessary components of our earth, and had come to respect the wild beauty of the storm.

Tucking his children into bed as the rain trickled down the window, Papa said, "This storm will pass soon. Would you like me to read you a story?"

And finding an old favourite, Papa opened a tale that began with the well-loved line, "Once upon a time in a far away land there lived an old man with a daughter named Belle."

Did you know that some of the most cherished fairy tales we tell today date back 6000 years, with perhaps the greatest tale of all time, *Beauty and the Beast*, showing up in folklore across multiple continents some 4000 years ago?

Fairy tales have lived on and survived through spoken word. These fairy tales pre-date English, French, and German languages, having existed in spoken Indo-European language for centuries.

In the 19th Century, the Grimm brothers believed many of the fairy tales they popularised in written form for the very first time, including Red Riding Hood, Cinderella, Hansel and Gretel and Snow White, were rooted in a shared cultural history dating back to the birth of the Indo-European language family. It's amazing to me that these stories lived on through the simple means of oral history. Don't you think that tells us something profound about what it means to be human... What it means to live in community... What it means to pass stories on from generation to generation?

You see, human beings are natural storytellers. The purpose of storytelling is to connect us together. Storytelling is one of the primary building blocks of community. Everything that is important to us as humans is contained in stories.

Storytelling is a gateway to our imagination. We can't have a just, equitable society unless we can imagine one. We are here to contribute something beautiful, and our storytelling is our ship that we sail on.

In our last worship time together, we looked at Psalms with the theme of hymnody, which are inseparably tied to stories. And today, we come to our final section of the themes of the Psalter, with Psalms of Thanksgiving. And what do you think the primary motif is for Psalms of Thanksgiving? That's right: storytelling.

But here's the thing that makes storytelling unique for Psalms of Thanksgiving: these Psalms tell stories of, what Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann calls *reorientation*. Perhaps you've noticed a movement in all our stories:

- There is creation and it is good
- Something enters the story as a catastrophe and the world is out of order
- We then suffer and groan under the weight of longing for the world to be made right
- And then, in an unexpected turn of events, restoration comes to creation and the ending is truly happy

This grand story, or what some call a metanarrative, can also be understood with the four seasons:

- **Summer:** there is creation and it is good
- **Fall:** sin enters the world and we find ourselves all broken
- **Winter:** we experience, perhaps what Lewis writes about of "winter without any Christmas" and wonder how long this season may last
- **Spring:** but in an unexpected turn of events, a saviour figure comes to set the world aright and creation blooms again

Twentieth century writer Northrop Frye in his book *The Great Code* will argue that all of our greatest stories come from this metanarrative of Scripture, where there is orientation in the good world, but disorientation through some catastrophe, and then re-orientation comes to us in an unexpected turn of events. God becomes flesh.

Frye will go on to contend that if we understand the Bible as story rather than blatant enlightened facts, we may yet find ourselves living into that story as well.

The Psalms of Thanksgiving recall God's salvation and sustaining grace, and they continually retell this story, even personalizing it with how God has been faithful to the storyteller in their life. Let's see how this plays itself out in our Psalm of today, Psalm 16.

I'm going to walk us through this Psalm verse by verse and so if you have your bibles open, I invite you to see this story of reorientation work itself out in this Psalm of David.

### **Psalm 16 verse by verse**

The big idea of Psalm 16 is reorientation, where David remembers God's promise to him that he will bring David to everlasting joy and pleasure. Let's keep this promise in our minds as we look at the following verses. We're going to journey with David, trying to place ourselves in the text by looking at the story through David's eyes.

#### *Verse 1*

David starts with a plea, "Preserve me O God." We don't know what David wants to be preserved from or for. But, I think his plea will become clear, for now though, it's important to note that the entire Psalm is based around this opening plea for help. David is disoriented, but notice what comes next: David pivots from a plea for help immediately into telling his own story through recounting the faithfulness of God.

David is resting on God's past refuge as the ground or reason for his petition to God to preserve him now. And that's what he seems to be doing for the first 8 verses of this Psalm - declaring and resting in what God is for him, as a way to strengthen his own hope in who God will be for him.

In verse 1, David says that God is the safest place he knows.

#### *Verse 2*

"I say to the LORD, 'you are my Lord.'" The all caps LORD here is Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but then the second Lord is personal as David recognizes the nearness to God and says, "you are *my* God." David says, "You're the God of my ancestors, but you're also my personal God."

#### *Verse 3*

There is a wonderful recognition here that David is not alone—and indeed—that David is not meant to go at life alone. He's taking joy in the holy ones, in God's people, who give him delight.

Oh friends, this is what the church is meant to be. God has a glorious dream that the church will not be a place of isolation, judgement, clicks, or gossip but a place of mutual relationship. If storytelling is our ship on which we sail, then our companions are our fellow row mates upon whom we are meant to lean because we are relational creatures at our very core. David is recalling this as he remembers his own story. He's not meant to go at it alone. Perhaps David is recalling that intimate bond he shared with Jonathan, the friend whom David said he loved more than his own soul. We are made for relationship and David remembers this in his psalm of reorientation.

#### *Verse 4*

David declares his unique allegiance to Yahweh, saying that he values and treasures God so highly that he will not run after other Gods.

#### *Verse 5*

David uses metaphors of his day to describe how close God is to him. "The Lord is my portion and my cup." In other words, if there are a hundred options of food and drink spread out on a banqueting table, and one of them is Yahweh, David will choose Yahweh above any other portion. Yahweh is a cup of sweetest wine, a feast for the ravished and hungry.

#### *Verse 6*

Again, David will use word pictures of his day to give poetic language to his heart's deepest words. He says, "the lines have fallen to me in pleasant places," The "lines" here are probably border lines—the borders or boundaries God appointed for him. Verse 6 could read as, "The borders of my life are boundaries around where God is." And, when David adds, "I have a beautiful inheritance," he is saying: God is my inheritance, and he is beautiful.

#### *Verse 7*

Here, David also remembers that God is his counsellor. God's counsel colours everything in life. We learn how to take refuge in God. We learn how to see God as our greatest treasure by letting Jesus love us. We learn to see God as the source of our greatest beauty by finding Christ through his body—the church. Poet Gerard Manley Hopkins describes this best when he writes, "Christ plays in ten thousands places. Lovely in limbs and lovely in faces not his." We see the beauty of Christ in our Jonathan friends, in our community of faith.

#### *Interlude*

Well, so far, David has been exulting in all that God is for him. Now, we see something striking in verse 8.

#### *Verse 8*

What has become of David's opening petition for God to preserve him? In verse 1 David asks for preservation, but in verse 8 David is confident, "God will preserve me; I will not be shaken. I will not be moved. I will be kept. Guarded. Preserved." David's disorientation has turned to reorientation.

#### *Verse 9 - 11*

And what is the result of telling the story of God in your life? It's joy! "My heart is glad and my whole being rejoices." David is moving into a very grounded, human reality now in verses 9-11, for he is declaring that God will preserve his very flesh and bones.

David expresses joy in verse 9, confidence in verse 10, and future hope in verse 11.

Because God has been David's portion in the past, and is his portion right in the here and now, David becomes confident that God will continue to be his portion even in death. This is what David prayed for, and what David now declares to have received, to be receiving, and to yet receive.

But hold on a minute, we need some context for David's confidence here, because David is confident that God will not abandon him to the realm of the dead, and David yet dies. What's going on here? Surprise, surprise, there's a story to be told for some context.

At the end of his life, David is troubled that there is no temple built for God. He grieves over this with Nathan the prophet, who tells David to do whatever is in his heart. But that same night, God comes to Nathan in a dream and this is what God says to Nathan, in 2 Samuel 16:11-14

*"The Lord declares to you [David] that the Lord himself will establish a house for you: 12 When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 I will be his father, and he will be my son.*

David knew a king was coming that would be his descendent and who would defeat death. This king would not see corruption like David, but would raise David up on the last day.

David lived in this confidence: I will lie down with my fathers in the grave. And one day a great King will enter the story, someone from my own seed, who will miraculously redeem and save us. He will turn our catastrophe to joy, our gloom to gladness, our striving to peace. Oh the prophetic imagination here of what was to come!

At this point, remembering that Scripture is one continuous story, it would be curious to ask: Where else in Scripture is this verse quoted? It's on the day of Pentecost! In his glorious sermon, Peter will directly quote from Psalm 16, and then this is what Peter says,

*David, being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Sheol, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. (Acts 2:30–32)*

The hope David anticipates, Peter joyfully declares, has been fulfilled in the man Jesus.

In Peter's letter in the New Testament, he writes, "*The prophets . . . searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories*" (1 Peter 1:10–11). The prophets didn't know how it would happen.

But now, when the fullness of time comes, Jesus enters the world and crushes death by death. Jesus killed death for himself and for the life of the world.

And friends, this is our hope: if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you (Romans 8:11). For this we give thanks to God!

Our stories of old prophecy of this self-giving love of Jesus, just as Belle sacrifices herself by loving the Beast. Our children yet find comfort in that story today because it echoes the Great Code, the greatest story ever told.

And so friends, what is your story? Scripture is not some isolated text or history: it is our story being told. The answer to life's biggest questions: "*Who am I? Why am I here?*" are not answered in some theory or notion. They are answered in the person of Jesus. So come. Enter the story of Christ's redemption. Be the church that offers a safe place for anyone to tell their story without shame and to hear Jesus say to them, "I made you. I redeem you. I love you." Welcome these strangers into the family of God, where together we look forward to the day of Christ's return, when we all together "will live happily ever after."

And friends, when your heart is desolate, when the story seems to be in an endless winter without any Christmas (hmm, didn't that just happen?!), or when the path seems unclear, join David in retelling the story of God's past faithfulness to you and promised faithfulness as your soul reorients itself to the redeeming story of God's unfailing, resurrecting love. Amen.

**Prayers of the People**

*You with ears bent close to our lips*

**By Walter Brueggemann, “Approaching the Psalter” from *Awed To Heaven, Rooted In Earth***

You, you are the one we address,

Always you,

Only you . . . who has given us life,

Who waits for us to answer.

We, toward you, speak and remain tongue-tied,

For we lack words that are honest enough,

And fierce enough to match you.

We do not speak first, but after our mothers and fathers,

Who knew cadences of honesty about our troubles,

Who knew cadences of danger about your presence,

Who knew cadences of fierceness to fit our rage and loss.

So we speak to you words that we have always spoken:

Words of praise and adoration:

... into your gates with thanksgiving,

Into your courts with praise...

Words of confession and remorse:

...against you and you only have we sinned...

Words of thanks and astonishment:

...you have turned our mourning into dancing...

Words of rage unabated:

...dash their heads against the rocks.

So many words we need to speak

To you from whom no secret can be hid,

You beyond us, you with us, you for us,

You with ears bent close to our lips,

You ... and our woes turned toward you, always you, only you,

Yet again you.

Amen.