



Thought for the Week – 4th July 2021

Psalm 16

- ¹ Keep me safe, my God,
for in you I take refuge.
- ² I say to the LORD, 'You are my Lord;
apart from you I have no good thing.'
- ³ I say of the holy people who are in the land,
'They are the noble ones in whom is all my delight.'
- 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.
- ⁵ LORD, you alone are my portion and my cup;
you make my lot secure.
- ⁶ The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
surely I have a delightful inheritance.
- ⁷ I will praise the LORD, who counsels me;
even at night my heart instructs me.
- ⁸ I keep my eyes always on the LORD.
With him at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.
- ⁹ Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;
my body also will rest secure,
- ¹⁰ because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead,
nor will you let your faithful one see decay.
- ¹¹ 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.

What do I say to you in this my last sermon as your Minister? Having peached here for the past 16¼ years that, I reckon, that's probably over 800 sermons, so what more can I say, or perhaps more importantly how can I sum up all that has already been said? The passage of scripture that came to mind is one I have not preached on previously, but which I believe is the one I should leave with you today.

It is Psalm 16 which we read together a few minutes ago and it was written by King David both as a song of praise and thanks to God and also a prayer for God's guidance and protection in the future. That alone makes it an appropriate text for today.

David begins with a brief request, "Keep me safe, O God" yet he already knows the answer, as he makes clear in the following verses. David is sure that God will keep him

safe because he has placed his life entirely and completely in the hands of God. Early on David had realized that apart from God he had nothing.

Folks, that's the realization that we all need to make. In common with all humanity we are separated from God by our sin. We have no hope of earning God's favour or buying him off- all we can do is admit our situation, confess our sin and throw ourselves on God's mercy. And we know that he is a loving and merciful God because he has sent his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ to be our Saviour. He forgives, heals and restores all who truly and sincerely put their trust in Christ. David is confident that God is his only hope and, as he says in verse 4 – those who put their trust in other gods or other things will suffer the sorrow of eternal separation from God

It was just over 46 years ago as a teenager starting studies at university that I put my faith and trust in God through his Son Jesus Christ, and like David I can echo the words of verse 5 & 6:

⁵ LORD, you alone are my portion and my cup; you make my lot secure.

⁶ The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance.

As I look back on my time at university and teacher training college and then my teaching career of 11 years, I can see the Lord's hand at work. Oh, that's not that I was always a perfect follower – far from it, yet I always knew, whatever happened, and however I strayed, that my "lot was secure" (as David puts it). He guided me to go on a church holiday to Dun Laoghaire in 1984, at the same guiding Anne through a different set of her friends to, somewhat reluctantly, go on the same holiday. And well, who says "holiday romances" don't last!

Then in 1991 I really felt the hand of the Lord guiding me towards full time work for him. I applied and was accepted for training for the Ministry. He got me through going back to study – even passing (by miracle, I think) my Hebrew and Greek exams. After a great couple of years as an Assistant in Cregagh, Belfast, I was called to Trinity, Greyabbey, where we spent a very happy 9 years before you decided to call me to Killead and Loanends. And now, after just over 16 wonderful years here, I can completely echo David words:

⁵ LORD, you alone are my portion and my cup; you make my lot secure.

⁶ The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance.

Truly I can say that for me "the boundary lines have fallen in pleasant places" here in Loanends/Killead.

In Loanends I have had the pleasure of baptising 51 children and conducting 27 marriages and rejoicing with folks on those happy occasions. Of course, there have also been sad

and difficult times during the 76 funerals of my ministry when we have wept together yet not without hope in the glorious Gospel of our Saviour.

In Killead I have had the pleasure of baptising 42 children and conducting 34 marriages and rejoicing with folks on those happy occasions. Of course, there have also been sad and difficult times during the 84 funerals of my ministry when we have wept together yet not without hope in the glorious Gospel of our Saviour.

Statistics do not tell the full story, and so much has happened that I could be here all day if I was to recount everything that has happened. It has been a privilege to work with 2 Kirk Session who have been supportive to me and who have a real love for the Lord and the work of his kingdom. The same goes for the Congregational Committee which has undertaken significant work and made improvements to our church property. It has been a blessing to be involved in at least a small way in the work of our Boys' and Girls' Brigade Companies, Youth Club, Sunday School (SALT) & Bible Class and all the dedicated leaders of those organizations. It is my hope and prayer that they will soon be able to get back to their "normal" work and witness.

As a passionate musician, it has been a particular delight for me to be involved with the Church Choir. Worship Groups and instrumentalists in both congregations. In Loanends I have have the privilege of working with Nick Beckett, Beverly Murray (as she was then) and Isobel Nesbitt as organists and with Helen Griffiths as Worship Group Leader. Similarly, in Killead it has been a privilege to work with Helen Lewis as Organist and Musical Director and Sam Hyde as pianist.

I could go on and thank all those involved in the other church organizations and activities and those involved in organizing the wonderful fund-raising activities that will remain long in my memory, but there's still part of the psalm that I want to mention.

Verse 8 says:

⁸ I keep my eyes always on the LORD. With him at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.

That is the verse that I would particularly like to leave with you encouraging you to keep your eyes always on the Lord, because with him at your right hand, you will indeed "never be shaken." I hope that you can say with the psalmist as I do – and here, as I've often done, I leave you with Eugene Petersons paraphrase of verses 8-11 in "the Message."

*Day and night I'll stick with GOD; I've got a good thing going and I'm not letting go.
I'm happy from the inside out, and from the outside in, I'm firmly formed.
You cancelled my ticket to hell - that's not my destination!
Now you've got my feet on the life path, all radiant from the shining of your face.
Ever since you took my hand, I'm on the right way.
Amen.*