

Psalm 16 & Acts 2:24-32

Handel's Messiah

"Thou didst not leave his soul in hell" 9/4/23

Psalm 16 probably seems a little strange a passage to choose for Easter Sunday.

But interestingly,

when the apostle Peter wanted to preach the resurrection on the day of Pentecost,

Psalm 16 was where he went.

And when the great musician George Fredrick Handel wanted to write a song about the resurrection,

Psalm 16 was where he went too.

So we will follow in the footsteps of the great ones and give it a go.

When I was younger,

I thought I was invincible.

I rode my bike to Melbourne University from Sandringham through bumper to bumper peak hour traffic.

I drove my car through pea soup fog on country roads at 100 km/h.

What could possibly go wrong?

For some reason I had no awareness of my fragile mortality.

Road toll statistics were just numbers.

It would never happen to me.

Maybe it came from my childhood

when dad would take us driving unrestrained in a trailer towed behind the car,

While we chanted,

"We want faster! We want faster!"

Now I'm older, safety matters.

Cherida would still like me to go slower around the bends in the road.

But compared to my youthful self,

I'm positively pedestrian.

The world has become very concerned about safety.

The big swings we used to play on as children
have been taken out of the parks and replaced with little ones.
In England, the poppies that they have for remembrance day
have had the pins removed so people can't prick themselves by mistake.
The workers who come to elderly folks homes
to help them with housework
aren't allowed to move any furniture in case they hurt their backs.
I've spoken to people over ninety who move the lounge chairs
so that the home help can vacuum underneath them
because the worker otherwise
wouldn't be able to move the chair when they vacuum.
It's possible we may have gone a little OTT in our concern about safety.

David wrote psalm 16 around a thousand years before Jesus was born.
And unlike us in our very safety oriented world,
he lived in a world where day to day safety just couldn't be guaranteed.
When he was shepherding his family's sheep,
he had confrontations with a lion and a bear.
That's not very safe.
When he was king of Israel,
if the nation was fighting a war,
he didn't do what kings and prime ministers do today.
They send in the army to sort it out.
No David led the troops in battle himself.
Well mostly,
there were occasions when he squibbed it and stayed home.
And when he did that, he was rebuked.
But the king's job was to lead the troops in battle.
In those days being king was not a safe occupation.

Well the first verse of psalm 16 is a plea for safety.
'Keep me safe, my God,
for in you I take refuge.'
Like people today in our super safety conscious society,
David wanted to be safe.

But unlike people today,
he saw that true safety comes from being in right relationship with God.
True safety comes from being in right relationship with God.
Here's how David expresses it in verse 2,

"I say to the Lord,
'You are my Lord;
apart from you I have no good thing.'"

The good things he's talking about are safety, refuge and security.
You can tell that from the verses around.

We might think of good things as holidays and nice houses.

David lived in a world where death often came suddenly.

The blessings he was looking for were safety, refuge and security.

Listen to verse 5.

'Lord, you alone are my portion and my cup;
you make my lot secure.'

Safety is what he's after.

He realises that safety comes from right relationship with God.

And we see that his view of safety is not for this life alone.

He wants God to keep him safe on the other side of death.

He trusts God to keep him safe on the other side of death.

That's where we get to in the last three verses of the psalm.

Let me read them again for you.

"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.

You have made known to me the path of life;

you will fill me with joy in your presence,

with eternal pleasures at your right hand."

There's no doubt that when David trusts in God for safety,
his trust extends beyond the grave.

And really if you want to be safe,

you need something to keep you safe beyond the grave.

It's the one thing that has been a certainty for every person in history.
They all died.
No one cheated the grave.
Taking the pin out of remembrance day poppies
is ultimately a futile gesture.
You might stop people from pricking themselves.
But you can't stop them from dying.
We will all die one day.
Life insurance can't change this fact.
Modern medicine can't change this fact.
So if safety is to be any real use,
it must stretch beyond the grave.
And that's where David's hope is.
He expresses in the words in verse 10
that Handel picks up in his resurrection song in the Messiah.
"You will not abandon me to the grave,
nor will you let your Faithful One see decay."
David believed in a God who could raise the dead.

Fast forward one thousand years or so,
and you have the apostle Peter on the Day of Pentecost.
He's preaching to the crowd about the resurrection of Jesus.
And this is what he says,
this is Acts 2:24-32,
"But God raised Jesus from the dead,
freeing him from the agony of death,
because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.
David said about him,
"I saw the Lord always before me.
Because he is at my right hand,
I will not be shaken.
Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;
my body also will rest in hope,
because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead,
nor will you let your holy one see decay.

You have made know to me the paths of life;
you will fill me with joy in your presence."

Fellow Isrealites,

I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried,
and his tomb is here to this day.

But he was a prophet

and knew that God had promised him on oath

that he would place one of his descendents on his throne.

Seeing what was to come,

he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ,

that he was not abandoned to the grave,

nor did his body see decay.

God has raised this Jesus to life,

and we are all witnesses of it."

The apostle Peter reads the psalm David wrote,
and he reads it as about the resurrection of Jesus.

David's tomb is here in Jerusalem,

he says,

the psalm must be pointing forward

to great David's even greater descendent.

Does that mean that David was mistaken

to put his trust in God not to abandon him to the grave?

Not at all.

The resurrection of Jesus is in fact the guarantee

that David's own hope was not misplaced.

How do we know that God will raise David ?

How do we know that God will fill David with joy in his presence?

The resurrection of Jesus is the first fruits.

God has demonstrated his power over sin and death.

What God has done for his only Son

he has promised to do for all of his children.

For all whose faith is in Jesus Christ,

God will raise them the same way he raised Jesus.

David spoke more than he knew.

He spoke as a prophet.
Someone who from a deep faith in God
and someone who from a sure knowledge of God's character
can see the way God will work,
even if he can't have known all the details.
And in God's providence
David expressed himself in such a way that it pointed perfectly to Jesus.
As Peter put it on the day of Pentecost,
"Seeing what was to come,
he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ,
that he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead,
nor did his body see decay.
God has raised this Jesus to life,
and we are all witnesses of it."

If the resurrection of Jesus was just about Jesus,
then that would be great news for Jesus.
Peter says,
'It was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.'
That's right.
Death has a hold on us because of sin.
Jesus lived a perfect life -
a life without sin.
So death had no hold on him.
That's something to be celebrated and admired.
But if it's just about Jesus then it's no help to me.
But the resurrection of Jesus is not just about Jesus.
When we become his followers,
then we have the benefits of his perfect life applied to us.
It's like your friend is a member of the MCG
and they let you use their membership to go to the grand final.
Like that only much better.
The 'I lived a perfect life' club has only one member.
But Jesus lets all his friends use his membership for eternity.
It's better even than that.

Jesus makes all his friends perfect
so they are rightly members of the 'I lived a perfect life' club
even though our lives are far from perfect.
And so Jesus' resurrection is the guarantee of our resurrection.

That is life changing news.
It gives great urgency to our task
of bearing witness to Jesus' resurrection.
Jesus' resurrection is not just a special thing that happened.
It's a special thing that happened that people even today can be part of,
or they can miss the opportunity.
Aren't you eager for your family and friends
to participate in Jesus' resurrection?
Like the apostle Peter on the day of Pentecost,
we have an urgent task of bearing witness to Jesus' resurrection.
Why do you think Peter was telling the crowd about Jesus' resurrection?
Jesus had returned to heaven by then,
it was after the ascension,
they would never see Jesus in the flesh.
Why do they need to know about his resurrection?
Because at his resurrection, Jesus is declared to be Lord.
He is to be worshiped.
A church is to be gathered who will participate in his resurrection.
And Peter was preaching the resurrection to gather that church.
Like Peter, we can't force people to respond to the resurrection of Jesus.
It's up to God to work in hearts.
To draw people to himself.
But we can get the news out.
Tell people about the resurrection of Jesus and what it means.
Give them the opportunity to respond.
At Holy Trinity, we are here to make disciples of Jesus.
As well as proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus and what it means
at public services,
we also proclaim his resurrection in small groups,
in our youth group, in our play group, at Trinity Tucker.

We run courses like Christianity Explored
to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus.
The resurrection of Jesus is the controlling principle
that guides all we do.
If we listen to Handel's Messiah like we will in a minute,
it's not because we prefer classical music,
it's because Handel did a masterful job
of bearing witness to the resurrection of Jesus.
We are utterly flexible about styles of music.
I saw a rewrite of Queen's Bohemian Rhapsody
telling the Christmas story this week.
If I remember I will use it for Christmas this year.
I don't care whether it's Handel or Queen.
Does it bear witness to the Lord Jesus?
That's the question.
The resurrection of Jesus
gives us the urgent task of bearing witness to the good news.

The resurrection of Jesus also gives us great confidence in our faith.
When we read those words from psalm 16,
'You will not abandon me to the grave,
nor will you let your Holy One see decay.'
We don't read those words as just as statement of David's faith.
Nor do we read them as only a word of prophecy about Jesus.
We read the psalm as properly about ourselves.
The Lord God will not abandon me to the grave.
If you are a Christian person,
then he won't abandon you to the grave.
When we read in the psalm,
"Keep me safe, O God,
for in you I take refuge."
We know that Yes, God will keep us safe.
Not just safe now.
But safe for eternity.
His safety stretches beyond the grave.

It's not take the pin out of the remembrance day poppy safety.
It's fair dinkum enduring safety.
Safety that will overcome whatever life throws at us.
Safety that in the end will overcome death.
That's the resurrection confidence that the Lord Jesus gives us.

Let's listen to that confidence expressed musically by Handel.