

“Absolutely Not Abandoned”

Series of Psalms (Lent 2023) – part 4

Psalm 16

[54-title slide] *Welcome, etc.*

Let's take a moment and pray together.

Thank you, O God, for this day. We are your people, gathered together as the Body of Christ, and we need you. We need your love. We need your grace. We need your encouragement and challenge to be the church you have called us to be. Do not let us slip into complacency or apathy, God, but let us experience the resurrection of Jesus Christ anew. Help us to hear this story, centuries old, like we are hearing it for the very first time, and to share it with others. Compel us to live lives that give you glory. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

[55-Psalms and ice cream] We are continuing a study of the psalms as we journey through Lent towards Easter. The last few weeks we have discussed how the Psalms are like the hymn-and-prayer book of the Bible. These are the very words that Jesus sang and prayed. And the Psalms cover a wide range of emotions, from joy to anger to sorrow to fear. It's kind of like an ice cream store – except that there are more than 32 flavors of psalms. So far, we've looked at psalms of praise and royal psalms. Today's “flavor of the day” is confidence.

[56-Confidence] Confidence psalms are expressions of trust in God. They are marked by an unshakable belief in God as our protector. A sense of security dominates the confidence psalms, with a minimal emphasis on any suffering the psalmist might be experiencing. In the confidence psalms we find some of the most memorable metaphors for God, such as shepherd (Ps 23), mother bird (Ps 91), rock and fortress (Ps 18), and stronghold and light (Ps 27). Words such as safety, shelter and rescue express certainty in God's protection.

[56-Confidence Psalms] So what do we mean by the word “confidence”? Confidence is the feeling you have when you just know something is going to happen – usually something good. It's kind of like faith, but stronger. “I am confident something will happen,” sounds bolder than “I have faith something will happen.”

A lack of confidence is debilitating. I remember my last year playing baseball when I was a kid. I had no confidence at all. I never got a hit all season. I can't even remember hitting a foul ball. I was so scared, I never swung the bat. Having no confidence is lousy. (Also, I got eyeglasses that fall.)

[57-Confidence] When you have confidence, it's contagious. You feel great, even before the outcome of a certain situation. It's March – and you want to be confident that your basketball team is going to win. When you are sick, you want to be confident that you will recover. Most importantly, if you are a Christian, you want to be confident in the God whom you follow.

How confident do you feel right now? The Bible tells us that having confidence is a choice. Psalm 16 tells us what this psalmist, King David, chose.

[58 - Psalm 16:1-2] Verse 1 tells us David found his refuge in God. God kept David safe. A lot of us are concerned with safety. We want to know the safety ratings of our cars. We buckle up when we drive. We expect banks to keep our money safe, and our schools to keep our children safe.

But the reality is that those things can fail. It is only God who keeps us safe, not people or things. One time, I got caught in an online scam. I thought I was so safe with my purchases, but I made a mistake. Thankfully, it only cost me about \$6, but it still rocked my sense of security. Even the pastor needs to listen to David's words – God is the only 100% safe guarantee.

David goes on to say he has chosen God, who alone is good. James 1:17 echoes this wonderful thought: “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights...” Is that your standard of goodness? God alone? If so, you know that all of your treasures are worthless compared to the goodness of God.

[59 - Psalm 16:5-6] Psalm 16 says there are so many good reasons to choose God. God sustains us – David gives us an image of a portion and cup (v. 5). Imagine going to your favorite restaurant. For me, that would be Mexican. Imagine being super-hungry, and the portions are hefty. I'm talking about a good portion of chimichanga! That's what David is saying about God. God fills us with things that last. While material blessings can be from God, more importantly, God gives us love, encouragement, forgiveness and purpose. Those are the things that fill our souls!

[60 - Psalm 16:7-8] I love verse 7, which says “Even at night my heart instructs me.” After a big, late meal, my stomach has a few things to instruct me! But have you ever had a night when you worried so much, you couldn’t sleep? Do you know the feeling in your heart when you have the absence of peace? David chose God – and his heart kept beating a rhythm of love and peace all night long. This is why memorizing scripture and meditating on God’s Word is so powerful – our hearts speak to us, even in our sleep, of the goodness of God.

Notice, too, in verse 8, there are other parts of David’s body involved in his confidence. He keeps his eyes always on the Lord – his gaze is fixed on God. When you are driving, you tend to go in the direction you are looking. This is why distracted driving is so dangerous. If you see something on the side that catches your attention, you drift that way. Faith is similar: if you keep your eyes on God, you follow God. If you take your eyes off of God, you drift.

[61 - Psalm 16:9-10] Confidence just oozes out of this psalm. But the most important part of this passage is found in verses 9 and 10. Let’s read them again. “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.”

Does that remind you of the Easter story? It should. The early disciples (Peter in Acts 2 and Paul in Acts 13) believed this was a prophecy about Jesus. King David foresaw that Jesus, the holy one, would not be abandoned to death, but would be the one who found the path of life. This psalm is a prophecy about Jesus’ resurrection.

[62 – Empty tomb] This is absolutely crucial to us. At every funeral I’ve ever preached, I have stated that Christians have no fear of death. How is that possible? Because we believe in a Savior who conquered death. The basic Christian message is that Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God, loves us so much, that he died for our sins, but through the power of God, Jesus rose again on Easter morning, and in him, we also have eternal life. That is a bold, life-changing message. It is no wonder that Peter and Paul and others confidently staked their lives on Jesus Christ.

[63 – mountain hiker] We can all have that confidence, no matter what is happening in our lives. Scripture commands to cast all of our anxieties and

burdens on the Lord, because he cares for us. (1st Peter 5:7 and Psalm 55:22) Do we do that? Or do we think we can conquer our fears and carry our burdens on our own? We have no confidence in God if we believe that we can solve all our problems on our own.

[64 – hand and rescue ring] Placing your full trust in God is scary. Having confidence in your rescue is not a natural thing. Once I went white-water rafting in a storm-swollen river. It was beautiful, but treacherous. And at one point, we shot the rapids with misplaced confidence. That moment is etched in my mind forever. The guide yelled, “Paddle hard right...Paddle hard left...Paddle back! Aghh!” We hit a huge boulder head on, throwing all but two people from the raft. I crashed into the water. When my head popped up, I was in the middle of a raging river, and I couldn’t see anyone. Not the raft, my group, not my guide. Nobody. Just waves and big rocks.

At that moment, I had a choice whom I was going to trust: my puny swimming abilities, or my God, who created the river. I took a breath, relaxed, and floated on my back until I was out into calmer water. It was freaky. I completely surrendered to the forces around me. In that moment, I believed that God would save me. And God did.

[65 – crosses] I am not promising that everyone gets everything that they want when they trust God. That’s not how it works. God is not some giant vending machine. Rather, God is asking us, “Do you have confidence in me?” Sometimes our greatest struggle is to let go. To float on our backs, spiritually speaking, and rest in the safety of the Lord. You will only have confidence in God when you finally realize that you cannot do anything in your own power and strength. I don’t care if you can bench press 400 pounds – none of us can fight our battles and win on our own. We must say, “Keep me safe, my God, for in you [alone] I take refuge.”

You know, 90% of churches in America are plateaued or declining. That includes us. I realize that. If I approach my ministry, my calling, thinking it is under my own power that our church will experience resurrection, I am woefully mistaken, as are we all. A pastor cannot save a church. There are a dozen other things that can – Jesus can save a church. Prayer can save a church. Forgiveness can save a church. Confidence in the Lord can save a church. In the end, God

didn't call people to save the church – God has called the church to save people. We must recognize that God has placed us here in this community to make it better. We must have confidence that we are only instruments guided by God's hand. We can be confident and work hard to ensure this church is part of God's kingdom in eternity if we completely surrender ourselves to the Savior, Jesus Christ.

[66 - Psalm 16:11] Read verse 11 with me again. “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.” Do you want to know that joy? Do you want to know eternal pleasures? This pathway to life is only found by following Jesus. There is no other way.

May God bless us all with the confidence that King David had, and may that confidence change our lives, our church, our community, and our world.

[67 – title slide] Let's pray.

Memory verse

Psalm 16:8 -“I have set the Lord always before me. Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.”

Reflection questions

1. How confident are you in our own abilities? What is your greatest strength?
2. What is your current greatest fear? How do you face it?
3. Do you have a fear of death? What does Jesus' resurrection say about the power of death over us?
4. What would it mean for you to have complete confidence in God? What would this look like in your life? What practical steps can you take to show Jesus your confidence in him alone?
5. Who do you know that needs to know confidence and the grace of Jesus? Will you pray for them and reach out to them with the gospel?