

Sunday, April 23, 2017

Beautiful Lines

Psalm 16

Marysville United Methodist Church

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Now what? Resurrection is fun to talk about at Easter. We might be in an extra festive mood. It sounds happy and positive. But then Monday morning comes. Maybe we're cranky. Life goes back to normal. We know the tomb is still empty but our to do list calls. We know life defeated death but that pile of laundry on the floor isn't going to fold itself. We know God's love always wins but the bad habits of our relationships drown it out.

What do we do with resurrection once Easter Sunday is over?

We think of resurrection like brushing our teeth, taking a shower or exercising. **Resurrection becomes a daily practice.** A way of life. It's not a crash diet at the holidays. Dying and rising can be an everyday reality in big and small ways.

This is the invitation of the way of Jesus. It's narrow, not everyone takes it, it's tough, but it's also fun, full of life and the best way I've seen to approach this one beautiful life we get to live.

So friends, this is what we do all year long. We practice resurrection. Because it takes a lifetime to learn how to receive this kind of gift.

Today we're looking at Psalm 16. This Psalm is celebrating the confidence we can find in giving our lives to Christ and living every day receiving resurrection. It's part of what we call the lectionary. It's a rotation that many churches around the world use to move through the Bible in a systematic way. We preach often in series where we can follow one main idea for several weeks. These standalone sermons on one text and theme can be helpful to tackle one week at a time as well.

Today we're going to talk about property lines, fences, traps and freedom.

Share story about finding our property line in Alaska at Thanksgiving in the snow -- running into our neighbors cutting up their moose! We had definitely reached the edge of our property line.

You might have heard about a study dealing with fences around a playground, and what children would do if the fences were removed. The question was raised after people feared that placing fences around schoolyard playgrounds, would limit the creative, exploring characters in developing children. "Hey if we get rid of this fence, then all these kids will have freedom! And explore what is OUTSIDE of the fenced area!"

Sounds pretty logical right? Remove the fence and the kids will become great explorers and creativity will be bursting forth from their little minds! Well guess again. Much to the surprise of everyone involved, the children did NOT explore, they did not become more creative, they did not experience freedom. In fact when the children saw that there was no fence, they all congregated near the doorway of the school! The exact opposite took place, rather than freedom being achieved, they achieved fear!

Boundaries. Fences. Limits. Lines. Sometimes they feel controlling, suffocating, like we're trapped. Other times they feel freeing and liberating.

Verse 5-6 caught my attention this week as I worked through this Psalm:

5 *You, Lord, are my portion, my cup;
you control my destiny.*

6 *The property lines have fallen beautifully for me;
yes, I have a lovely home.*

The property lines have fallen beautifully for me. I couldn't shake this phrase from my mind this week. It made me think of how life can be before saying yes to God and after choosing to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

Draw a box with person in the middle. Lots of arrows pointing inward.

The lines can be a trap

- Before Christ is at the center of our lives, we get to draw our own lines.
- We define who we are, what we do, what we like, what our life means. We do what we want. We might try to fill our life with as many things as we can.
- We fill our box with noise, activity, mindless chatter, too many commitments, anything that might fill the places in us that ache with emptiness. How does the box feel now? It's crowded and overwhelming in there. A bit like a trap.

But when we surrender our lives to the One who made us, the property lines fall beautifully for us.

Draw a second box with person in the middle.

There are boundaries that free us. There is abundance that astounds us. There is margin and space to listen deeply to the One who made our heart.

The lines can give freedom

- When we seek to follow the way of Christ, the very same box, our very same life, the very same lines can give freedom. We are still a beloved child of God, but how we move inside the lines can change.
- This statement in verse 6, *the property lines have fallen beautifully for me*, is a reminder to our soul that we have everything we need in God.
- It's like the kids in the fence experiment. The boundaries gave freedom to explore, to play, to create. **The portion that God is giving you in this season of your life is exactly what you need.**
- And look at all that white space? It's called margin. It's not that we don't add stuff but we're very intentional about it. We can say no! And we say it freely!
- **The margin is where the magic happens.** The quiet, silence, stillness. That's where we hear something new. Psalm 46:10 - "Be still and know that I am God."

Our life can feel like a trap. Or it can feel like freedom. God wants your resurrected life to feel like freedom.

Bruce Larson tells how he helped people struggling to surrender their lives to Christ:

For many years I worked in New York City and counseled at my office any number of people who were wrestling with this yes-or-no decision. Often I would suggest they walk with me from my office down to the RCA Building on Fifth Avenue. In the entrance of that building is a gigantic statue of Atlas, a beautifully proportioned man who, with all his muscles straining, is holding the world upon his shoulders. There he is, the most powerfully built man in the world, and he can barely stand up under

this burden. 'Now that's one way to live,' I would point out to my companion, 'trying to carry the world on your shoulders. But now come across the street with me.'

"On the other side of Fifth Avenue is Saint Patrick's Cathedral, and there behind the high altar is a little shrine of the boy Jesus, perhaps eight or nine years old, and with no effort he is holding the world in one hand.

"We have a choice. We can carry the world on our shoulders, or we can say, 'I give up, Lord; here's my life. I give you my world, the whole world.'"

Friends, look at the lines in your life, the box you have drawn around who you are. Look at the things that fill this life you get to live. Do you ever feel trapped, stuck, unsure? Or are there glimpses of freedom?

I've found as I surrender more and more of my life to the resurrection power of Jesus, I'm okay with the boundaries. With the lines that Jesus draws in me. I actually crave them. Before I wanted to do things my own way and I saw limits as constraining. "You don't get to tell me what to do!" Now I see the portion God has give me, the lines drawn around my life as being *exactly* what I need. I want the things that God wants for me. Because I have not found *life* in all the other things I thought would fill me up.

If we believe God really does want the best for us and for every child God created, then the lines are beautiful. They are not a punishment, a correction, a judgement. The lines are grace, peace, freedom, joy, wholeness.

The good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that Jesus can teach you a new way to move in your life. Because the lines have fallen beautifully for you. You have access to what you need for wherever you feel stuck right now. Talk to God. Listen. Your heart will know what to do.

When we're not spending all our energy filling our box, it's surprising how much room is left over for simplicity, quiet, listening, growth and love.

When God is our portion, we have everything we need. Everything else leaves us wanting more.

Read as a guided meditation

1-2 Keep me safe, O God,
I've run for dear life to you.
I say to God, "Be my Lord!"
Without you, nothing makes sense.
3 And these God-chosen lives all around—
what splendid friends they make!
4 Don't just go shopping for a god.
Gods are not for sale.
I swear I'll never treat god-names
like brand-names.
5-6 My choice is you, God, first and only.
And now I find I'm *your* choice!
You set me up with a house and yard.
And then you made me your heir!
7-8 The wise counsel God gives when I'm awake
is confirmed by my sleeping heart.

Day and night I'll stick with God;
I've got a good thing going and I'm not letting go.
9-10 I'm happy from the inside out,
and from the outside in, I'm firmly formed.
You canceled my ticket to hell—
that's not my destination!
11 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.