

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church – Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod  
Tempe, AZ  
3<sup>rd</sup> Midweek Advent Service  
December 20, 2023  
**Let go... and look around**

<sup>1</sup> Guard me, O God, for I take refuge in you.

<sup>2</sup> I say to the Lord, "You are my Lord.

I have no good apart from you."

<sup>3</sup> The holy ones who are in the land are glorious.

All my delight is in them.

<sup>4</sup> Those who chase after another god will increase their sorrows.

I will not pour out their drink offerings of blood.

I will not take up their names on my lips.

<sup>5</sup> Lord, you are the cup that has been given to me.

You have secured an allotment for me.

<sup>6</sup> The property lines chosen for me fall in pleasant places.

Yes, a delightful inheritance is mine.

<sup>7</sup> I will bless the Lord, who guides me.

Even at night my heart instructs me.

<sup>8</sup> I have set the Lord always before me.

Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.

<sup>9</sup> Therefore my heart is glad,

and my whole being rejoices.

Even my flesh will dwell securely

<sup>10</sup> because you will not abandon my life to the grave.

You will not let your favored one see decay.

<sup>11</sup> You have made known to me the path of life,

fullness of joy in your presence,

pleasures at your right hand forever.

– Psalm 16

Picture perfect. In our world, you need the perfect picture. This has especially become the case since the advent of social media. Whether their platform is Facebook or Instagram, many people are motivated to get an amazing picture from an event. Can't you notice that during the Christmas season? But pictures are often lies.

Let me share an example with you. Last Saturday, my family and I had a long day. We had Christmas for Kids in the morning. Then, I had some visits in the afternoon. While I made some pastoral visits, Michaela, my wife, was at home with all four girls while cleaning the house. Nevertheless, when I got home around 4 p.m., we were all exhausted.

Yet, that evening we had plans to go check out some Christmas lights in Eastmark. We had heard about a house that had some favorite cartoon characters dressed up, hot cocoa, and cookies. The neighborhood even had a golf cart parade. This sounded like a picture-perfect Christmas activity. It would also be perfect for a picture.

This evening was not all that picturesque. We had a 35-minute drive with four young kids. They were fussy in the drive-over. When we got there, we got our picture – then realized that there wasn't anything else to do. So, we saw the short parade and went home. All-in-all, we drove over an hour for a five-minute experience and a picture.

Now, we could put that picture online for likes and views. The picture turned out quite well. 3 of the 4 kids were looking at the picture. The problem, though, is that the picture was a lie. The evening wasn't picturesque. It was deflating.

Have you had experiences like this around Christmas? Whether it is searching for the perfect picture or searching for the perfect Christmas celebration, it is easy to become disappointed by such things. You see people's perfect pictures, but you don't always see behind them. Many times the pursuit of the perfect Christmas is not met with satisfaction.

For some people, Christmas itself can become an idol. Pursuing the perfect Christmas and picture of the day can overshadow the true beauty of this holiday. This December, we are encouraging you to let go of Christmas. Now, I encourage you to let go of the perfect Christmas... and hold onto Christmas perfect.

Today, as we consider this thought, we will walk through Psalm 16 to see the true beauty of the season. There it is written, *"A miktam by David."* To begin, we see that this psalm is written by King David. Although King David is the human writer, we should note that these words are not his alone. Some things are said in this psalm that cannot be spoken by David. There needs to be another speaker in this psalm. We will see this as we further unpack it.

The psalm is called a miktam. This term is elusive. Yet, as we compare it to the other psalms that bear this title. They seem to be psalms that recognize the joy that is found in God amidst suffering.

Now let's get into the body of this psalm. Here David wrote, *"<sup>1</sup>Guard me, O God, for I take refuge in you."* God is our refuge. This is a common theme throughout the psalms. This certainly makes sense for David to write. Many times throughout his life, David needed protection from problems. The Psalms were written and compiled for use in public worship. Calling upon God to be our refuge and guard us makes sense for believers to cry out during this life.

David continued, *"<sup>2</sup>I say to the Lord, "You are my Lord. I have no good apart from you."* It would make sense for David to say this. David pursued good apart from God at a time during his life. This led to utter heartbreak. We too find that there is no true good apart from God. Consider this concerning turning a perfect Christmas celebration into an idol. Ultimately, this separates Christmas from God. As you may know from experience, this does not lead to joy. Often, the pursuit of the perfect Christmas leads to heartbreak too.

Then David wrote, *"<sup>3</sup>The holy ones who are in the land are glorious. All my delight is in them. <sup>4</sup>Those who chase after another god will increase their sorrows. I will not pour out their drink offerings of blood. I will not take up their names on my lips."* Honestly, these verses are difficult to study. Yet, they are clear. Pursuing other gods leads to increased sorrow. These false gods don't need to be openly worshiped as deities. These false gods can be worshiped secretly in the heart. Christians can be tempted to make aspects of their "Christian" life an idol. Even their celebration of the Lord's birth. So, turning the perfect Christmas into your idol would lead to many sorrows. Perhaps, this is the sorrow that many feel around this time when the food and presents aren't quite right.

From there, David directed one's attention to the fulfillment and joy that is found in the Lord. David wrote, *"<sup>5</sup>Lord, you are the cup that has been given to me. You have secured an allotment for me."* The Lord is the cup that was given him. The Lord secured an allotment for him. So, things in this world might not fulfill. David recognized this. We too should recognize this. The perfect Christmas may not come. Yet the Lord gives you fulfillment.

David continued this thought, when he wrote, *"<sup>6</sup>The property lines chosen for me fall in pleasant places. Yes, a delightful inheritance is mine."* As we study this Psalm, we study a piece of Hebrew poetry. In Hebrew poetry, the middle verse is often the thematic, most important verse. This verse then should be highlighted for us. The high point of this psalm as David wrote is a recognition that believers receive pleasant places and a delightful inheritance from the Lord. In this verse, David is drawing off the imagery of the division and distribution of the Holy Land for the tribes of Israel. As a modern-day reader, this can be applied to our reception of the promised land of heaven.

With the blessing of eternal life in mind, David wrote, *"<sup>7</sup>I will bless the Lord, who guides me. Even at night my heart instructs me. <sup>8</sup>I have set the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. <sup>9</sup>Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices. Even my flesh will dwell securely."* In these verses, David reflected on the joy that comes from the Lord resulting from the eternal salvation that God gives. This joy led to rejoicing in the Lord. We too are moved to rejoice in God because of the salvation that he has given us. Therefore, we are moved to rightly celebrate Christmas. We don't celebrate to have the perfect picture or the perfect evening. Instead, we celebrate because of what God has done for us in his love.

Thus far, this psalm strikes us as a wonderful psalm in which David's words of faith can be put into our mouths. Yet, verse 10 is where things get confusing. There, David wrote, *"<sup>10</sup>because you will not abandon my life to the grave. You will not let your favored one see decay. <sup>11</sup>You have made known to me the path of life, fullness of joy in your presence, pleasures at your right hand forever."* Wait... what did David write here? You won't let your favored one see decay? I'm pretty sure David's body saw decay. David has been dead for about 3,000 years. How can David speak these words?

Well, remember that I had said that these words are not David's alone. Psalm 16 is messianic. This means that it is a psalm about Jesus. This is a psalm in which the pre-incarnate Christ, or the second person of the Triune God or Jesus before he took flesh, was speaking.

Think through that for a moment. The first half of this psalm spoke about delighting in following God's will. These are Jesus' words. Jesus during his life here on earth delighted in following the will of his Father. Jesus came to live under the law. He delighted in doing it. What wonderful news for us for whom Jesus came to live. The second half of this psalm reflected on Jesus' joy, his resurrection, and his exaltation. Although Jesus came to suffer and die, he had joy in what he came to do because he was the ultimate victor. Then Jesus died, but he did not remain in the grave. Jesus' body did not see decay. Jesus rose from the grave. After his resurrection, Jesus ascended into heaven where he was exalted. He is seated at the right hand of the father.

Because the words of the psalm are Jesus', they can be David's words and ours too. Because Jesus' body did not see decay, we have confidence in eternity in heaven. We have confidence that our bodies will be raised. Because the words of the psalm are Jesus', we can have real joy during this Christmas season.

As you get ready for Christmas, remember that the perfect Christmas doesn't come from the festivities, friends, photos, or even family being just right. Don't turn the celebration of Christmas into an idol. As this psalm told us, those who pursue other gods feel sorrow.

The perfect Christmas is made not by the celebration and such activities. The perfect Christmas is made by a different holiday. That is Easter. The psalm that we look to today is perfect for an Easter celebration. This psalm shares the confidence that we have in Jesus' resurrection.

Maybe, this year your Christmas celebration can be more like an Easter celebration. It strikes me that our celebration of Easter is not hampered as much by having all the holiday festivities in order as Christmas can be. Instead, Easter can be a proclamation of Jesus' victory over sin, death, and the devil. During this Advent, we look forward to celebrating Jesus' first coming. Jesus took flesh to fight against our enemies. The battle was one. We know this because Jesus rose from the grave.

So, let go... and look around. Confidence in the resurrection and eternity with God makes this life a whole lot more beautiful. Maybe your Christmas celebration won't be perfect, but a life with God is a good life. There is fullness of joy being at God's right hand. Look around at the peace, joy, and love that God gives.

Brothers and sisters, your Christmas celebration doesn't need to be perfect. If you miss the picture opportunity it is okay. If the food is overcooked, it is okay. This is because our Christmas celebration was perfected by the celebration of Easter. Let go of the perfect Christmas... and hold onto Christmas perfected. Then, look at the true beauty of the season. Christ took flesh to live for you. Christ died on the cross for your sins. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed, Alleluia. Amen.