

# The Second Sunday of Easter, Gospel Year A

## The LORD of History

### Psalm 16

#### The Second Sunday of Easter

#### Analysis by Bruce T. Martin

*16:1 Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge. 2I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you." 3As for the holy ones in the land, they are the noble, in whom is all my delight. 4Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows; their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names upon my lips. 5The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. 6The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; I have a goodly heritage. 7I bless the LORD who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me. 8I keep the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. 9Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also rests secure. 10For you do not give me up to She'ol, or let your faithful one see the Pit. 11You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fulness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*



## **DIAGNOSIS: Empty Handed**

### ***Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): When the Church is Not Church***

Sure, we know better. But it's not easy, so we don't. We don't like being Church, so we don't. We prefer a blood-less, cross-less gospel that doesn't invite us to go outside of ourselves, so we don't. Instead we look inside; there we find an infinite variety of ways to distract ourselves from being fully human, especially for others. The Psalmist's "delight" was in the "holy ones in the land"—code language for God's election of Israel (v. 3)—to the exclusion of all others. Do we not do the same? How small is our circle in whom we delight? The world is watching.

### ***Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): When the LORD is Not Our Lord***

Unlike the cultic idols that the Psalmist knew, today we prefer our idols to be whatever our more sophisticated modern culture

desires. Yet they are as inward looking, self-serving, unhistorical abstractions as ever. They, too, “multiply our sorrows” (v. 4) by over-promising what they cannot deliver, crushing our expectations. Instead of the history making LORD (Exod. 3) of Abraham and Sarah and Moses et al., our “lords” today are manifold and easy to identify: Love, Fear, Beauty, Power, Justice, Health, Success, Sports, Expertise, Sex, Retirement, Patriotism, Safety, [insert your own idol-god here]. We take these created gifts and make them suit our own purposes rather than our Creator’s. Here the Psalmist might well agree. But if the Psalmist’s greater “delight” was in God’s election of Israel, a gift far surpassing all others, we likewise must add our delight in Christ (and Bible and God and Church) to our list of idols/gods/lords when used contrary to their gifted purpose. Is Christ not for the whole world to see? The “good” of our idol-gods is twisted by our misplaced trust in them, whether by missed-use, miss-use, or under-use. We thereby demonstrate, for all to see, our continued bondage to Ourselves (aka Sin), making us incapable of saying of the LORD of history: “We have no good apart from you” (v. 2).

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): When God Withdraws His “Right Hand”**

Psalm 16 was likely written, possibly by a priest, just before or just after Judah’s exile to Babylon (thus c. 600 or c. 500 BCE). The Babylonian Exile was quickly attributed to Israel’s collective unfaithfulness. And although the Exile itself lasted less than 100 years, to those who recognized the LORD of history, it seemed like the Exile never really ended even after their Return to the Land, Hasmonean independence and rebuilding of the Temple. For these Jews, God had, as it were, withdrawn his “presence” or “right hand” from them (see v. 11; leaving them, as Luther put it, with his left hand) well into the 1st century CE and beyond. As they saw it, they were never again a

free and independent nation as promised by God (2 Sam. 7), and the brutal Roman occupation only confirmed it. Would-be messiahs, understood as properly appointed kings, came and went (but see, famously, 1 Sam. 8). The arrival of their LORD in Jesus of Nazareth, a crucified messiah, was recognized by no one. How had Israel missed it? Because they did not understand that their election was not so much for them as for the world (Rom. 9-11; Gen. 12:3). By turning their election into a self-serving political idea instead of God's Story of Love, they missed Jesus and missed out on God's mercy. In the stark, final terms of our Psalmist, God had—within history and contrary to their expectations, given them up to “She’ol,” the “Pit” (v.10), that is, as though they were dead to God. The dead Jesus, king of the Jews (see Mark 15:32), confirmed it for all the world to see.

Can we, the 21st century Church—as we say, the visible body of Christ for the world—when we are not Church and when the LORD is not our Lord, expect any less than our 1st century cousins? Is God withdrawing his “presence” or his “hand” from us as well, for all the world to see? Or are we also blind and falling headlong into the “Pit”? We were warned (see 1 Pet. 4:12-19).

## **PROGNOSIS: True Loyalty**

***Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Hand-in-Hand with the LORD of History***



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in the glory of God and God's new creation) did anyone recognize, in Jesus' ministry and crucifixion, that the LORD of history had lived and loved among them. Only then could anyone surmise that God's election of Israel was and always had been in her service to humanity. God's love elects. God's love ventures outside. As Jesus had demonstrated, Israel's "delight" was not to be satisfied within her own circles (self, family, nation) but to be engaged with God's creation in ever-widening circles. This, then, is the love of God: to create history by electing Israel, and through Israel to elect the world. God's "presence" to Israel and to all creation was only hinted at by the LORD's presence in the Tent of Meeting and in the Jerusalem Temple. But in Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified and risen "king of Israel," the LORD of creation and new creation was fully manifest, for all the world to see. There was nothing abstract or bloodless about Jesus. God's story of Love is manifest within history, or not at all. In the outward movement of the Church, or not at all. As the living body of Christ. The Psalmist rightly declared: "You show me the path of life" (v. 11; see John 14:6).

### ***Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Blessed Assurance***

The key to Good Friday, and every day thereafter, is Easter Sunday. From now on, old creation is being transformed into new creation. By God's presence, by God's love, by Christ crucified and risen. That is what we see. True, such Love comes at great cost, but our promising future is assured, purchased as it were by the blood of Christ. Day by day, history is being made. We could even say, created. By God's continual assurance of forgiveness and fresh beginnings: by means of our Spirited baptism and with his "body and blood." With these new-creational gifts we are comforted in our travails (travels into the world) and encouraged in our love (for the world). O, blessed

assurance! The Psalmist had rightly said: "In your presence there is fulness of joy" (v. 11; see Matt. 28:20).

***Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Clothed in Yellow***

In Christ, the LORD of history has taken our hand into his hand and is leading us into a future formed by Love. The world is watching. Waiting, too. Waiting to see, even before they can see, what God's election of Israel and the whole of creation is about. In the world, in history, in the body of Christ, in us. Election is a continuing story, with fits and starts. One particularly bright place, recently, was in Wuhan, China. There, when everyone was afraid to venture outside due to the frightful virus ravaging their city, some people were going door to door offering help or supplies to neighbors and strangers. They were wearing yellow coats to let everyone know that they were there only to help. They became known, lovingly, as Yellow Christians. Luther would have called them "little christs." Wuhan's Yellow Christians, we might say, were following a "path of life," hand-in-hand with the LORD of history. What love, what comfort, what "pleasures," were being offered to those who opened their doors! And what a "delight" these new neighbors (the newly elected) were to those clothed in yellow (v. 3 fulfilled)! There, amidst a deadly scourge, the Church was being Church, and the LORD of history could be seen as incarnate Love. God's story of Love continues. As the Psalmist gushed long ago, "In your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (v. 11).