

November 22, 2015
All of Us Are Refugees
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Psalm 16

Song of Trust and Security in God. A Miktam of David.

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

Time for a small church history lesson. Today is the last Sunday of the Christian Year, Proper 29 or Christ the King Sunday, depending on one's tradition.

In 1925 Pope Pius XI added Christ the King Sunday to the liturgical calendar. His idea was that celebrating Christ as King would help Christians combat the destructive forces of the modern age ... which was ironic of course, since in 1925 - even though WWI was over - the modern age's truly destructive forces weren't even warmed up yet.

Only ninety passes of the liturgical calendar later, here we are again: the church, still struggling to perceive humanity as citizens of a single kingdom, subject to a single Lord -- as unbelievable some days to the people who bear his moniker, as to the species at large, "*Christian*," more often than not, being more indicative of distinction, separation, exclusion, selection and preference, than of the guarantee of inclusion and connection for all humanity we read about in the New Testament.

Jesus died once ... and for whom?

For all. For all people. For all time. To make ALL people citizens of His one kingdom, a kingdom known partially and vaguely in this temporal world, but plainly and fully in the world into which we shall all one day rise.

Making us what, friends? Each and every one of us?

A people not at home; a people in-between; a people living on the shore between two worlds, waiting to be carried to our true home, where all is peace and rest and, as Carl's mama said, "You never have to figure out what to make for supper!"

For twenty years Psalm 16 has been my favorite Bible chapter, verse 5-6 my favorite Bible verse: ⁵ *The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot.* ⁶ *The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; I have a goodly heritage.* If you ever need to break into my laptop, the code is 'pleasantplaces,' all lowercase, no spaces.

Of course it's my favorite, since no human in the history of humans ever had an easier life than mine. How easily I put myself in God's hands and stay there, where nothing truly terrible bad has ever touched me. I've read too many newspapers this week and watched too much news; and cried more tears than usual.

All that rinsing gave me new eyes for the psalm. I saw, right here in verse 1, *Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge.* ² *I say to the Lord, "You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you."*

I thought about the thousands and thousands of refugees in the news, aching and crying and praying for someone to protect them; and how I think the passage is about me in verses 5 and 6; and if it's about me in 5 and 6, isn't it also about me in verse 1?

And if it's about me in verse 1, and about you in verse 1, and we are all citizens subject to this one King, suddenly I see that every last one of us is a refugee in this world. Every last one of us is making the best of life here while we wait to be received into our true home, by the One who made us, who sustains us, and who calls us to do the same for others here and now as we wait.

Sadly, Pope Pius' idea didn't catch on in time to head off the destructive forces of his time. Sadly, I'm not sure his idea has really caught on yet. But his heart was definitely in the right place.

And it's our turn now; our chance to turn the tide of church history:

To be the church who, in word and deed, regards Christ as King and every human being as kin. To be the church, in word and deed, that steps away from a world perfectly

comfortable categorizing humanity as friends, enemies, and *all the rest*; and categorizing *all the rest* as worthless, little more than garbage, creatures whose fate is of no consequence to us. To step away from that and treat every human being as kin, friends.

You want to talk about radical religion? This is radical religion like the world has never known! except in Jesus Christ, of course.

See friends, we live in a time and place where the leaders of the most powerful country on earth use their power to proclaim and to mandate that certain human beings are not worth the risk of protecting.

Shame on all of them! Shame on them for grandstanding instead of helping. Shame! for using their power for talking like cowards instead of acting like heroes.

But on the other hand, who cares what they say?! They aren't our king and this is not our home. This place is our assignment, friends! This place is our place of service! Our mission! And our task here is to wait, to trust, and to serve.

All over the world today, people will wash up on a beach; stagger across a border; slip under a fence; and, best case scenario, land in some kind of makeshift camp where they sit and wait and pray for months, possibly years, hoping and trusting in the benevolence of people they have never met, for their survival ... and their children's survival.

Friends, if only we could yield our whole selves to what we already claim to believe: that God is; that God is good; that God is able - to keep us in his hands whether we live or die. Imagine the world we'd live in.

We'd fear nothing and no one; we'd love hugely; we'd give so generously; we'd sleep so well; and we'd never, ever, ever pull back from the opportunity to rescue a brother or sister who was counting on us, be it a refugee across the ocean or some guy we pass on the street.

Trust is the central work of faith for refugees everywhere, including us, yielding our lives -- heart, mind, body and soul -- to the faith that God is; that God is good; that God is able: to bring us home when our time comes; to sustain us here in the meantime, where we may serve one another with whatever courage is called for, because of what Christ, our King, has done for us.

Would you pray with me?