



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

1611 E Main St., Watertown, WI 53094

(920)261-2570

A Stephen Ministry Congregation

www.goodshepherdwi.org

2nd Sunday After Epiphany

January 15, 2017

“A Beautiful Inheritance”

(Psalm 16:6)

Rev. David K. Groth

“The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance” (Psalm 16:6).

Collect of the Day: Almighty and everlasting God, who governs all things in heaven and on earth, mercifully hear the prayers of Your people and grant us Your peace through all our days; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

This last summer I organized my very first garage sale. I gleaned and decluttered the house and then borrowed some tables from the neighbors and set everything up in the garage. I searched the web for pricing advice and posted an ad in the newspaper and neon signs in the neighborhood. The end result? It was a monumental waste of time. The first day I think I averaged \$2 an hour. So I slashed prices and I told people I'm highly motivated to sell. Nothing worked. Some people saw my hang dog look and made what I think were pity purchases.

Last week I was visiting with Stan Jones. He's an auctioneer and I asked him about trends in his work. And he said the Boomers are downsizing, but the next generations aren't as interested in stuff but are more interested in travelling and experiences. Moreover, many millennials don't have homes anyway, and so they don't have basements and attics and garages, the usual depositories for stuff. And so stuff, even antique stuff is losing much of its value.

And then, just on time, there was an article in the Wall Street Journal which confirmed the trend. It was entitled, "Lock the Door! Your Boomer Parents Have Decided to Downsize" (Nov. 11, 2016). It said, "Economists have long talked about the great transfer of wealth that is under way from the baby boomers to Generation X and millennials. Less noticed is the great transfer of . . . lawn ornaments, curio cabinets and faded family heirlooms that are now causing friction in families." It's not because they're fighting over these things; it's because no one wants them. One retired couple is moving from a spacious home in Minnesota to a sleek new condominium in Arizona and has to unload decades-worth of

accumulated treasures. “We don’t want to take it to the Goodwill; we feel like our children should take it, and they should want it – but they don’t.” The next generation has no place for that collection of porcelain birds nor would they ever use the wedding china.

Making it all more difficult are the sentimental back stories. “Seventy five years ago your Pappy made this rocking horse for me when I was a little girl”. To say, “No thanks” is to insult your sainted Pappy and your soon to be sainted mother.

Finally, last week I took a trunk full of stuff that I couldn’t sell to St. Vinny’s and asked those in the receiving warehouse their thoughts on the topic. One woman said, “I have five grown kids, all married. I loaded a large table with all kinds of knickknacks and other treasures and over the holidays asked them to take what they wanted.” Between all of them they took three little things. She said she wanted to say, “Thanks a lot.” Her husband said he has shoe boxes full of photographs. No one wants them either. But he’s holding on to them hoping that, like an old violin, they’ll become more valuable with time.

Stuff. What kind of stuff have you inherited? What will you give your kids as an inheritance?

In our text, David writes, “The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed I have a beautiful inheritance.” The lines David speaks of are measuring lines, the kind used to mark the boundaries of real estate. Plots and fields and vineyards and orchards were all measured with lines. And here David says, “The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places. He’s been richly blessed and he knows it. My guess is he’s not thinking about a rocky field. My guess he’s thinking about his family and his vocation as king and his palace and his full, rich life. But what intrigues me more is how he articulates it. “The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places.” Sounds kind of passive, doesn’t it? He’s not saying he earned what he has. He’s not saying he really busted a gut early on as a young man and aggressively saved and is now finally enjoying the fruit of his work. No, the

way David says it makes it sound as if God has given him something great. “The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places.” Sounds like he’s feeling blessed rather than entitled, fortunate rather than deserving, grateful rather than proud.

“The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places.”

Can’t we all say that? Can’t we all acknowledge that there’s not a whole lot of room for entitlement or pride in our lives, but instead, there’s a gift nature to everything we have? For what do you really have that hasn’t been given you? Your house? It’s a gift from God. Your education? Gift. Your job and benefits? Gift. Your savings? Gift. Not convinced? Think of Luther’s explanation to the 1st Article of the Creed. “I believe that God has made me and all creatures and given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reasons and all my senses, and still takes care of them.” That is without your parents who changed your diapers you would have died a hundred times over in your own filth. Without your teachers who taught you a good portion of what you know, you wouldn’t be very employable. Without living in a prosperous country, there wouldn’t be very many jobs for which you might apply. Without the rule of law, where criminal behavior is arrested, prosecuted and punished, you might not have the courage to leave the house. Can’t you see how you had nothing to do with so much of what you take for granted and enjoy and depend on? Luther continues, “He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink . . .” It’s so easy to start thinking of these things as earned by the sweat of the brow. But no, when you think like that, you’re just forgetting your God, who gives you those things.

What do you have that hasn’t been given you? Show me an example and I’ll show you someone who’s beginning to think he’s self-made, self-sufficient and doesn’t need God anymore. He can come along for the ride if he wants, some may think, but it’s really not necessary. The truth is you are utterly dependent on him and need him for every breath you take.

The truth is the lines have fallen for you in pleasant

places. And where they aren't pleasant and don't feel pleasant, are you going to pin that on God? Is it because God is miserly and mean, cheap and chintzy? Or might it have something to do with the choices you've made? Could it be also we are people whose lives can be wrecked by sin, who live in a world that's wrecked by sin?

When it doesn't feel like the lines have fallen in pleasant places, for example when you're sick and broken and lying flat on your back in the hospital, even then is there nothing for which to give thanks? Can you be grateful for all the people God uses to care for you, the nurses, their skilled and tender care? Can you be grateful for the pharmacists, and the medicines that take the edge off the pain? Can you be grateful for the volunteer who brings in a copy of the newspaper? The dietician, the CNA who makes you comfortable, the friend who visits? It surprises me every time I witness a medical procedure from beginning to end . . . how many people God is using to care for you. Can you be grateful for that? Also for the promise that God is with you every step of the way, loves you, and has saved you, and is even now preparing a home for you in heaven where "he will wipe every tear from your eyes, and where there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain"? Can you be deliberately grateful even when it feels like the lines haven't fallen in pleasant places? Remember what Paul said? "If we are children, then we are heirs; heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ . . . I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18).

David's thinking about that too. In our text, he writes, "Indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance." Remember, David's the king. What could Jesse his father give David that he doesn't already have? As king, David has it all – the best of everything money can buy: food, clothing, palace, entertainment. But David knows there are some things money cannot buy, and that's why he's looking forward to the ultimate inheritance and teaches us to do the same. A few verses down he writes, "In your presence there is

fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” That’s the inheritance David was looking forward to and the inheritance we can look forward to as well.

“Fullness of joy”. It’s better than what money can buy. Nothing lacking. Nothing missed. No disappointing gap between expectation and reality. Fullness of joy. Not the curio cabinet full of porcelain knickknacks. Not Pappy’s dusty rocking horse. “Fullness of joy” is not and cannot be found in stuff, old or new. Fullness of joy is not and cannot be found in a massive monetary inheritance either. Rich people do not know this fullness of joy, none of us does, not yet, not really, not until we are with the Lord in heaven. “In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”

That’s the inheritance we can look forward to, and it’s not because we earned it, but because God in Jesus Christ has made us his peculiar treasure. 1 John 3, “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are” (V. 1). We are the “apple of his eye” (Ps. 17:8). He has made us co-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17). There’s nothing we’ve done to deserve that. It’s all gift. Just like the shoes on your feet, so also his death on a cross: it’s all gift. Revelation 7: our robes have been made white in the blood of the Lamb (v. 14). Or, as written later in Revelation, we are his people, his church, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. We are the inheritance with which he is contented and fully satisfied.

What can we do in response? I’m thinking now of your children and grandchildren. What will they need most when you die? Will it be your porcelain owl collection, or will they need God’s Word, (Law and Gospel), pointing to a hope that comes only from Jesus Christ and him crucified? Will it be a huge infusion of cash so they can go out and kick some tires, or perhaps also a place where they are surrounded with caring and helpful brothers and sisters, who sing and commune and confess and serve along side of them? What will their youngsters need most? More electronic gadgets

with addictive games? Or a healthy and vibrant Lutheran school that not only prepares them for life but also, in a way, prepares them for death? What kind of legacy do you want to leave behind? What kind of inheritance will your posterity need? The clutter that you dumped on them, or the faith you impressed on them?

I know many of our children will move far away from Watertown. Let's trust wherever they go there is a Word and Sacrament church that is preparing and planning for the future, even as we are doing that for other people's children and grandchildren . . . a healthy, active and vital church awaiting them.

When he gave us his Son, Jesus, God did not choose to give us what we most wanted. He gave us what we most needed. Let us do the same for our children and grandchildren. Why? Because you have a beautiful inheritance prepared for you and you want them to share in it too. Amen.

