

It is well
Psalm 16
July 1, 2007

So, how are you?

It's a rhetorical question. I don't expect you to answer aloud, but I do want you to think about it. How are you?

Are you feeling anxious, angry, apathetic, afraid? Antsy, alone, ashamed, amazed? Annoyed, adventurous, alienated, aglow? Are you feeling affectionate? Awesome?

There are lots and lots of possibilities, and we're still in the A's! There's a whole alphabet of feelings still to consider!

Are you feeling joyful or sad? Are you feeling eager or reluctant? Are you excited or worried or restless or content? Are you doubtful or resolute? Eager to connect or eager to escape? Are you thinking about the past, or anxious about the future, or just enjoying the moment?

How is it with your soul? Are you at peace with God? Are you at peace with the circumstances of your life? Are you at peace with yourself?

*When peace like a river attendeth my way
When sorrows like seas billows roll
Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say ...*

It is well ...

In times of peace and in times of sorrow, it is well. In good times and in bad times, it is well. For better or for worse ...

Two days ago, on Friday, my daughter, Louisa, and her fiancé, Cody, stood here in the chancel of the church and made a promise to each other to have and to hold, for better or for worse, for the rest of their lives. What a thing to promise! What an audacious vow! What a staggering undertaking!

I know because I've been trying to keep such a promise for the last twenty-nine years, and I know how inconstant and selfish and preoccupied and frail and imperfect I am, and I know how fickle and unpredictable and daunting the twists and turns of our lives can be. Who am I, who are they, to make such a promise?

And yet I know, by my own experience, the astonishing and most wonderful blessings of keeping the promise. As frail human beings, we dare to commit ourselves to something that demands extraordinary attention and patience and forgiveness and endurance and love -- practical, gritty, day-by-day love -- for better for worse, in good times and in bad, and that commitment, that shared life, takes us to places we could not have imagined and would never have discovered otherwise.

It's a lot to promise, but we do. It's a lot to say, *It is well*, no matter what, but we can.

*You, Lord, are all I have,
and you give me all I need ...*

At this point, I must give you a warning. Proceed with caution! If you choose to go further, if you choose to continue to listen, be warned. It is a perilous path. It is a daunting message. Not everyone can hear it. Not everyone can bear it. It is a path that leads to joy; it is a path that is joy. But it is not an easy path, not a way for the faint of heart.

*You, Lord, are all I have,
and you give me all I need ...*

It sounds wonderful, doesn't it? What's so hard about it? *You give me all I need ...* But tell me, what do you really need?

Do you need possessions? Which ones? What of all the things that you have right now could you not do without?

Do you need a house, an apartment, a comfortable and attractive place to live? You couldn't live, without it? *Foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lie down and rest.*

Surely you need food? Yes, you do need food to live, and yet: *Human beings cannot live on bread alone.*

Do you need friends, a best friend, a companion, a husband, a wife? You were not made to be alone, but could you be ... alone? When your friend moves away or your partner dies, is your life as good as over?

Do you need a family? OK, let's stop right there! Let's not not say any more!

I will say no more except to say that there is a book you can read to explore this question further: *What do you really need?* It is the book of Job! *You, Lord, are all I have ...* For Job, that became literally true. The Lord was all he had left. The Lord was all he had. And it was enough.

It is enough! And yet, there's more. *You give me all I need ...*

The two statements making up that sentence seem contradictory. If the Lord is all you have, you have nothing else, and yet, the Lord gives you all you need, whatever that is, so you have something else too. It seems contradictory, but the paradox itself is the powerful and empowering truth. You, Lord, are all I have, but having you, I have ... everything! Not everything I want, but everything I need, everything the gracious Lord chooses to provide, everything I need ... for fullness of life!

This is something very different from stoicism, from self-denial, from disciplining your passions and ridding yourself of all desire. It's not that you have nothing. You have the Lord! It's not that you are emptied -- body and soul -- of everything, of all wants, all cares, all hopes, all dreams. You are filled -- body and soul -- with the Lord! The Lord! *You, Lord, are all I have!* I have you!

This is what faith is: *You, Lord, are all I have ...* Not the God who fills in the gaps, a God who proves a useful aid when you happen to run into the limits of your wisdom, your energy, your power. Not a God who is there when you fall short or when you need help, or when you're sick or when you're in trouble. But a God, the Lord, who is there in every moment and in every place, not filling in the gaps over and above what you already have, but is indeed all you have!

And if you have the Lord? You have everything you need. You have everything you need ...

It is well!