

Psalm 46
"The Lord of Hosts Is With Us"
Reformation Day (Observed)

October 29, 2023
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, West Salem, Wisc.
Pastor Peter Adelsen

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Reformation Sunday can easily become a day of celebrating German and Scandinavian heritage. Or it can easily become a day we focus on one man, a sinful man, Martin Luther.

Now, Luther was important, we can't dismiss that, but he was only an instrument of God. He was only a means God used to proclaim His truth.

We are not "Lutheran," because we worship Martin Luther. We're Lutheran because that name became synonymous with right teaching. We're Lutheran because it became synonymous with the sound teaching of the Word of God. We are "Lutheran," because being Lutheran means it's all about Jesus. Behold, God is our refuge and strength!

Psalm 46 is well known to us. It's well known particularly because of Luther's hymn "*A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*," which is a paraphrase of Psalm 46. This hymn, which we sang earlier, has been a comfort for so many Christians. This hymn and Psalm recognize the real problems we face because of the fallen world, our sinful flesh, and the devil, but it also provides comfort and security to those who are in the fortress of Christ's protection.

The world of Luther's day was filled with plagues and death, and the devil was recognized as active in the lives of everyday people. Today, the fallen world denies the devil's existence, but he is still at play as he tricks people into thinking that good is evil and evil is good. This psalm recognizes all these troubles and tumults, while at the same time reminding us that "***God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble***" (Psalm 46:1). Our God is a mighty fortress, He is our refuge, and all who trust in Him are safe.

God is our refuge and strength in the midst of natural disasters. Natural disasters are everywhere. Tsunamis, earthquakes, mudslides, wild fires, floods, hurricanes, and tornadoes plague our planet. Just recently, the fires in Maui, or closer to home, the fires throughout Canada and how that Canadian smoke has affected us here.

The fears that natural disasters provoke are the focus of the first section of this psalm: ***“Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, through the mountains tremble at its swelling”*** (Psalm 46:2-3). The earth is giving way. Mountains are falling into the seas. The waters are roaring and foaming. The earth is trembling.

It is easy for Christians to say that we will not fear, but doubt is an inevitable result of the sin within each of us. Doubt causes us to fear at the turmoil of the natural world. Some are better at hiding their fear than others. Even we Christians will not overcome the totality of fear in our lifetime since our sinful nature is still part of us.

In addition to natural disasters that we face in this fallen world, fallen humanity itself causes us great anxiety and fear. In so many cases, humans cause much more pain than natural disasters do. Nevertheless, God is our refuge against our worldly enemies as ***“the nations rage, the kingdoms totter”*** (Psalm 46:6a).

- Violence, wars, and rumors of wars are all around us: the mass shooting in Maine, the ongoing Israel-Hamas war and the Ukraine-Russia war, and the wars that we are not aware of.
- Civil unrest has become all too common. Murder, abortion, sexual sins, theft.
- People being told to repent of their skin color, as if we can repent of how God intricately knitted us together in our mother’s womb. (Psalm 139:13)
- People violently protesting against the very foundation of what is good, right, and salutary.

Sin does not understand itself to be sinful since it looks inward to its own desires – and sin seeks to remove anything that threatens these desires.

Not only are people and nations raging, but they are also doing so because the devil and his demons are real and remain active in this fallen world, seeking to do evil and bring despair and death to God’s creation.

But through it all – *natural disasters and nations raging* – God promises to be our refuge and strength, our very present help in trouble. He is our refuge from the powers of evil. The devil is constantly on attack in this fallen world. He attacks through social secularism and spiritualism. He first seeks to remove God from the world; second seeks to provide false gods.

- The false gods of manna – trusting in money and possessions.
- The false gods of health – trusting only in sinful man for cures, rather than God.

- The false gods of celebrity – trusting in the advice of actors, politicians, and social media influencers, rather than God’s truth.

All of us must repent of falling away from God and into the devil’s lies.

Yet, again, God promises to be with us. In the midst of all of this, **“The Lord of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress”** (Psalm 46:7). But we still have questions. *“Where is God readily found in times of trouble?”* *“Where is He in the time of my need?”* *“How is God a refuge and strength?”*

This confident voice in Psalm 46 sounds very different from the voice of Psalm 22, **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”** (Psalm 22:1) Or Psalm 10: **“Why, O LORD, do you stand far away? Why do you hide Yourself in times of trouble?”** (Psalm 10:1). Or Psalm 13: **“How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide Your face from me?”** (Psalm 13:1). In suffering, we often wonder where God is.

For some of us, if we are honest, the voice of Psalm 46 may sound hollow. The fact is, in times of deepest need, God seems not to be present. He seems to not be easily found. Where is He when we need Him most?

God answers that question. He answers that question by naming a place: a river. **“There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High”** (Psalm 46:4). But how is this an answer for us? What do these words have to do with us? Well, during one Passover, Jesus found men selling cattle and exchanging money in the temple. Angered at the sight, Jesus overturned the tables and threw out the merchants. When the Jewish authorities demanded to know who He thought He was in doing such an outrageous thing, Jesus said: **“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up”** (John 2:19). Then John explained that the temple He spoke of was His body (John 2:21).

The voice of Psalm 46 speaks to us when we see that the temple it talks about – *the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High* – no longer names *only* a place but also a *Person*. In Jesus, God is present for His people. He is a help readily found. By healing the sick, feeding the hungry, raising the dead, Jesus began to restore His fallen creation to what God intended in Eden. So, to be around Jesus was to experience God’s merciful presence. No wonder Jesus is the source of **“living water”** (John 4:10-11; 7:38; Revelation 7:17) and is **“the water of life”** (Revelation 21:6; 22:1, 17). Christ also tells the Samaritan woman: **“Whoever drinks of the water that I will give**

him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:14).

This River makes glad the city of God. The **“city of God”** is no longer a geographical place, but a people. The Church is the **“city of God”** gathered around the Word that God offers us in the preaching of the Gospel and in the Sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, which promise us forgiveness, life, and salvation! Here, we come together around these Means of Grace because it is here that God is **“very present”** as **“a help”** in times of trouble (Psalm 46:1).

In the Lord’s Supper, we hear God’s grace as He says, **“Take, eat, this is My body; Take, drink, this is My blood ... for the forgiveness of sins.”** We receive His grace through His body and blood in our mouths. We also receive the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus sends to live within us and to strengthen us; and in the fellowship of **“the city of God,”** all these gifts give us foretastes of the feast to come.

So, God is **“very present”**, and He is easily found. He is found as “the River.” This River’s streams make glad the city of God – the Church. In a world full of chaos, there is nothing that can harm those who are in Christ Jesus. The world can torture and kill, but God has defeated the powers of sin, death, and the devil through the death and resurrection of His only Son. All the raging powers cannot stand against the crucifixion of Jesus, His bodily resurrection, and our Baptism that intimately connects us to Him. When Jesus returns in glory, He will say, **“Be still and know that I am God”** (Psalm 46:10a). Then and only then, there will be peace.

Until that day, we do live in a fallen world of natural disasters, wars, rumors of wars, protests and violence, and every other kind of sin. Yet, this Psalm reminds us that no matter how chaotic things may seem to be, God stand above all things, and He promises us a place of comfort and safety in the midst of evil. We find this safety in Christ – in His Word and Sacraments. Apart from Him, there is only death, fear, suffering, and the works of the devil. But in Jesus, we have the Mighty Fortress. We have peace that is beyond all human understanding as **“the Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress”** (Psalm 46:7, 11). Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +