

“A MIGHTY FORTRESS IS OUR GOD.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Psalm 46

Welcome.

Good Evening and welcome. What a blessing and a privilege to so freely gather together and worship our God. It's my privilege to open the Word of God to you as it's given us in the forty-sixth Psalm. I invite you to turn to it and keep it open as we go through it. It has already been read so I won't do that again.

Prayer:

Prayer with me please. Holy Father in heaven, we bow before you our creator, sustainer and redeemer to humbly ask that according to your riches in glory you would grant by the power of your Holy Spirit that your Word be faithfully spoken and fruitfully received that we might be changed by it. Glorify yourself, exalt your Son, lift up the Truth, in your name we ask it. Amen.

Introduction.

Can you imagine being David hiding in a cave in the wilderness with a crazy king and his army trying to kill you?

Can you imagine being Mary and Joseph fleeing to Egypt with a little boy in your arms and a crazy king and his army trying to find him and kill him?

Can you imagine being an early Christian in the catacombs of Rome with a crazy Caesar and his army trying to light you on fire to be a torch in his garden?

Can you imagine being a Jew in Poland with a crazy Fuhrer and his army trying to capture you and burn you in his ovens?

Can you imagine being a Kurd with a brutal Isis army out to destroy you and all your people?

Can you imagine living as a refugee on the run in Syria or Iraq?

Can you imagine living in Liberia in fear of a microscopic terrorist like Ebola?

Can you imagine being a Junior High school girl being bullied and traumatized to the point of wanting to kill yourself?

Can you imagine living in a world where people with guns or bombs randomly enter planes or schools or sporting events to kill people?

Can you imagine ever needing a fortress, a refuge, a stronghold, a rock, a high tower?

Can you begin to enter into the mind and heart of a 38 year old man called before a tribunal of bishops, scholars, pastors and politicians being attacked for what he believed and wrote, and excommunicated and condemned as an outlaw and under the threat of assassination? In fact, anyone who killed him was promised they would not be prosecuted.

Can you begin to feel the power and promise of a Psalm like Psalm 46? Can you begin to appreciate the emotional and spiritual power of a hymn that grows out of this Psalm 46 as Luther and his closest friends sing it over and over again in times of distress and discouragement?

Psalm 46.

Brothers and sisters, we wake up every day in a world filled with evil and sin, with violence and danger, a world filled with devils and demons. We live in a world where there are people with full time jobs compiling statistics for abuses, crimes, deaths and diseases.

We want to live in a world that is safe and comfortable, where everything is under control. And as countries go United States might be as good as it gets. But even here in the United States our thin veneer of relative safety and security can be ripped away in an instant by gunshots and viruses, natural disasters, sin or death.

So what can we do? Where can we turn? Who will help us, who will speak? Psalm 46 helps us voice our fears and face our enemies and overcome our doubts and anxieties.

The background of Psalm 46 is a world filled with violence and evil.

Verses 1-3 are filled with images of ground splitting earthquakes, erupting volcanos, inundating flood waters and tsunamis. The sea has always had the potential to be menacing and tempestuous. But mountains are supposed to be unshakable, images of what is most enduring and dependable. What a frightening scene that even what is most secure is falling apart.

Then follows images of political violence and upheaval in verse 6, angry nations, kingdoms disintegrating and governments melting like wax in the hot sun.

Finally there are images of military violence in verse 9, wars, bows, spears, and chariots.

The violence of nature and of nations and of man's inhumanity to man. This is a fallen world in active rebellion against its God and by all appearance there is no stopping it.

The theme of Psalm 46.

But notice something in this Psalm. While it's filled with violent images, that's not the subject of this Psalm. This isn't a Psalm about how bad our world is, this is a Psalm about how great is the Lord of Hosts, the Most High.

"The Lord Almighty, the Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah."

This isn't a Psalm about the power of nature, but of God's power over nature. It's not about the power of nations, but of God's power over nations.

It's not about the power of man in wars, but of God's power over wars.

The theme of this Psalm is the reality of God and of His presence with His people in the worst of times.

The Psalmist has chosen this title of God with great intentionality. *First*, this is the powerful God, the Lord Almighty is the Lord of hosts, the Lord of vast armies, angelic troops numbering ten thousand times ten thousand, all swiftly carrying out the Lord's commands.

Second, this is the personal God, the God of Jacob. He is not far off, He is not removed, or uncaring. He Himself is in our very midst. In a violent world we are protected by a powerful God; in an impersonal world we are loved by a present God. Safety and intimacy, two of the greatest human needs and desires met in God.

God is not just our help, but our sovereign help. God isn't reacting to what comes to pass, He ordains all that comes to pass. His sovereignty is not partial or sometimes or just in good things, but always over all things.

Verse 4 and 5 are a powerful affirmation of faith in the midst of this world of ours.

4 There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High.

5 God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns.

This city on a river got me curious so I got out my National Geographic Atlas to confirm that almost without exception from antiquity to the present the great centers of civilization are built on waterways. My interest was particularly those cities built on rivers.

Memphis and Thebes of old, and present day Cairo are on the Nile, the longest river in the world. Ancient Nineveh with Nebecanezer's great hanging gardens was on the Tigris, as is present day Baghdad. The mighty Babylon was on the Euphrates.

The list grows as you move out of the middle east. Rome is on the Tiber, Paris on the Seine, London on the Thames, Bonn and Cologne on the Rhine, Vienna, Budapest and Belgrade are all on the Danube, the longest river in Europe. On our continent Minneapolis, St. Paul, St. Louis, Memphis, and New Orleans all on the mighty Mississippi.

I say all this to emphasize a geographical and historical fact. Jerusalem, one of the greatest and most important cities in all history, has no river and is far from any sea. It sits on a high plateau.

When man builds a city he build by a body of water, a source of life, food, drink, transportation, protection. He thinks he is wise to build in such a way and trust in his own wisdom.

When God builds a city He makes it utterly dependent on Himself for all its provision and protection. God is her river, God's presence is her source of life.

Revelation 22:1-2 describes the location and source of this river.

*1 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, **flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb** 2 down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.*

What is the river that makes glad the city of God? God Himself.

God the Father:

Jeremiah 2:13 for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

God the Son:

Zechariah 13:1 On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness.

God the Holy Spirit:

John 7:38-39 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" 39 Now this he said about the Spirit.

John 4:13-14 Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 14 but 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."

God is the one who provides an abundance of good things and give us drink from the river of His delights (Psalms 36:8). He is the one who quiets the waters and gives us rest (Psalm 23:2). He is the one who cares for the land and waters it (Psalm 65:9-10). He is the one who can make streams in the wilderness and water the dry ground (Isaiah 35:6-7; 44:3-4). He is the source of life for the fruit of the trees He was planted by His streams of living water (Psalm 1:3; Jeremiah 17:7-8).

God is the refuge and God is the river; the source of life and the unshakable keeper of life.

Psalm 46 concludes with a well-known command:

"Be still and know that I am God."

Be still. Cease your striving. Silence your arguments. Stop your murmuring and complaining. Cease from your busyness and hurrying.

Be still until you know who I am and what I am doing and will do.

Be still until the impact of my absolute supremacy over all the universe moves in on you and settles over your soul.

Be still until I am more certain to you than your own flesh; until I am more real to you than your situation.

Be still until my authority and power over all nature, over all nations, over all the evil intentions of all men, over all diseases, gives you a settled confidence and peace that I have already triumph over them all and I will again.

Be still until you know that I will be exalted in and over all nations and over all the earth, that my glory will be made known, that my will will be done, that every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Be still until the impact of these words is as dramatic in our own souls as Jesus' words from the bow of that boat in the storm were for the disciples, "peace, be still!" Who is this that even the wind and waves obey Him? Who is this who can quiet every raging storm, every fear and anxiety and doubt? Be still and know I am God.

"The Lord Almighty, the Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah."

The Best Commentary ever written on Psalm 46

When the battle of the Reformation raged it's fiercest and when Luther felt most weary and distressed from the constant assault he would call his closest friend, another great reformer, Philipp Melancthon, and say to him, let's sing Psalm 46. Luther being a great musician wrote his own loose paraphrase and wrote a tune which we now know as A Mighty Fortress.

A Mighty Fortress is Our God became the rally cry of the Reformation, the Battle Hymn of the Reformation, a source of tremendous comfort for believers then as it still is today.

*A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing;
Our helper He, amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing:
For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe;
His craft and power are great, and, armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal.*

On earth is not his equal.

We may not be Satan's equal but with our God to aid us we are more than his equal and can put him to flight. Greater is He (God) that is in you, than He (Satan) that is in the world (1 Jn. 4:4).

Romans 8:31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

*Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing;
Were not the right Man on our side, the Man of God's own choosing:
Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He;
Lord Sabaoth, His Name, from age to age the same,
And He must win the battle.*

Revelation 17:14 They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.”

*And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us:
The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him.*

One little word shall fell him.

That could either be the word spoken at creation will now recreate and make everything right; or the Word made flesh, what crushes the head of the serpent and dwells among us, that Word sharper than any two edged sword.

Revelation 19:11, 15-16 Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. ... 15 From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. 16 On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

*That word above all earthly powers, no thanks to them, abideth;
The Spirit and the gifts are ours through Him Who with us sideth:
Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also;
The body they may kill: God's truth abideth still,
His kingdom is forever.*

Jesus taught in **Matthew 12:29**: “And everyone that has forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit eternal life.”

And Paul testified in **Philippians 3:7-8** But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.

And Jim Elliott affirmed: “He is not fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

Revelation 11:15 Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.”

Brothers and sisters, life is filled with dark and dangerous times, times of depression, despair, or discouragement and God is present in them all. When they those times come and they will, let

us hear Martin Luther's call to his close friend Phillip Melanchthon, "Come, Philipp, let's sing the forty-sixth Psalm."

Ein Feste Burg ist unser Gott. A Mighty Fortress is Our God.